Master of Sacred Theology Thesis   Concordia Seminary Scholarship

5-1-1994

Hebrew Narrative: Theory for Proclamation

Alan Toenjes

HEBREW NARRATIVE: THEORY

FOR PROCLAMATION

_____

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

_____

by

Alan M. Toenjes

May 1994

Approved by: _____
                              Advisor

_____
                              Reader

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE NARRATIVE PROBLEM

"And it came to pass . . ." With these words many biblical narratives have

their beginning. What follows is often interesting and eventful, at times even thrilling

or spellbinding. As stories, the events depicted are easy to follow and conform to

many standard conventions and rules followed by all narratives.[1] As *biblical* stories,

however, should they be read in a way different than non-biblical stories? If so, then

what *are* these differences?

The answers to these questions are of central importance for the Christian

preacher who chooses a Hebrew narrative as the basis for his proclamation. If he

follows the three-year lectionary, he will have this opportunity approximately one-third

of the time.[2] What is there in these texts for the pastor to proclaim? Where can he

look for guidance in this task?

There are numerous and divergent opinions about the methods for preaching

Old Testament narratives and their relative ease. In commenting on the topic of

---

[1]Standard conventions and rules followed by all narratives would include the presentation of characters, conflicts between characters, resolution of conflict, development of plot, realistic nature of the persons and events described, etc.

[2]The Three-Year Lectionary appoints few Hebrew narrative texts, considering their relatively large proportion of the entire Old Testament: 55 of the total 168 Old Testament lessons selected for reading, not counting the Eastertide readings from Acts, are narratives. The overwhelming majority of OT lessons come from the prophetic oracles (57 from Isaiah alone).

preaching narrative texts, William Thompson is bold to list this task as "probably the

easiest":

> Narrative material is not only the most extensive but the best known of
> biblical material; it is also probably the easiest to preach. The reason is that
> stories have identifiable characters who are like us; we can readily become
> involved in the dynamics of the event. . . . The preacher must make sure that
> listeners see themselves as persons of need who are encountered by God.[3]

Thompson here employs the sermonic method of identification or analogy, a method

that compares similar human experiences. He trusts the scriptural record as God's

Word and sees benefits in involving his parishioners in the narrative's events.

Apparently, becoming "involved" and "encounter(ing)" God is Thompson's homiletical

goal in preaching narratives. (The specific benefits and dangers of this homiletical

approach will be given in Chapter Five.) His view of the relative ease of the task,

though, is not shared by all who write on this subject. Just such an opposing view is

espoused by Donald Gowan:

> The historical books of the Old Testament contain some of the most difficult
> materials for the average preacher to deal with homiletically. They are for the
> most part so political and contain so little that is obviously theological that the
> question must surely have been raised by many whether there is any theology to
> be found in them, thus whether there is anything to preach from them.[4]

While Thompson relished the ease of identifying with narrative characters, Gowan

emphasizes the importance of theological interpretation for the homiletical task. Here

he reveals a different view of Scripture from that of Thompson, seeing narrative

---

[3]William Thompson, *Preaching Biblically: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 106.

[4]Donald Gowan, *Reclaiming the Old Testament for the Christian Pulpit* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), 15.

history as serving a political, not a theological, purpose. He attempts to maintain higher-critical views while at the same time upholding the value of theological, textual preaching. This leads him to disdain narrative texts as unsuitable for "the average preacher." They are difficult to preach because they are difficult to interpret.

Upon further investigation of Thompson's and Gowan's proposed *methods* of narrative interpretation and application, their differing views of the task's difficulty are understandable. Thompson's high view of Scripture and homiletical emphasis on an encounter with God allows him to see narratives as easy to preach; the parishioner meets God as he identifies with the characters in the narrative. Gowan sees narratives as difficult to preach because he focuses on a theological understanding which is difficult for him because of his low view of Scripture. The level of challenge that accompanies the assignment of Christian proclamation of Hebrew narrative is dependent on the preacher's definition of the preaching task and his presuppositions concerning the text of the narrative. Thus, these presuppositions and definitions must be clearly understood and acknowledged in order to focus specifically on the tasks of interpreting and preaching.

While acknowledging (enthusiastically!) the close relationship between homiletics and exegesis, this paper will approach Hebrew narratives from the vantage point of the exegete, specifically, that of the *Lutheran* exegete who confesses Scripture as God's Word of both Law and Gospel. From this point of view, this thesis will posit a hermeneutical understanding of Hebrew narratives as Scripture that will be of value for the preacher.

A fundamental presupposition that this paper shares with the likes of Thompson, Gowan and others, is that it is important to preach on Old Testament texts. It is no secret that this assumption has not been wide-spread and that there has been a lack of Christian preaching on Old Testament pericopes. Several reasons for this phenomenon may be cited: lack of familiarity with the texts and their contexts (on the part of parishioners and pastor); inability to work in the original languages; or perhaps even more fundamental misunderstandings concerning the relationship and relative importance of the two testaments.[5]

One such fundamental misunderstanding is that of minimalizing the value of the Old Testament by implying that its temporal distinction of being before the Incarnation (thus the "old" of Old Testament) somehow relegates it to a second-class status behind that of the New Testament, the record of Messiah's arrival. True enough, the "older" testament is fulfilled in the New; without the New Testament account of Christ's birth, life, and death, we would not know exactly how the messianic promises were fulfilled. But would the B.C. life of faith be that much different? We would still believe in the same Lord, receive His same Word of forgiveness, and trust in the coming of the same Messiah. No, the value of the older testament is not obviated through a supposed total dependence on the New. The New Testament era preacher has the privilege and mandate to proclaim the fulfillment of the Old Testament in Christ, but this does not imply that Old Testament life was somehow second-rate, less valuable, or (at worst) unforgiven.

---

[5]Horace Hummel, "How to Preach the Old Testament," in *Concordia Pulpit* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1986), 1-3.

This incipient Marcionist view that the Old Testament is in any way a different

Scripture is dangerous also in that it suggests a potential distinction in God's plan of

salvation--separate dispensations for the deliverance of faithful Israel and for the

eternal life of Christians. Such a view would be tantamount to caving in either to a

full-blown Marcionite dualism or to a dispensationalist god who had to make up for

his lack of foresight of Messiah's rejection at the hands of the Jews. Needless to say,

neither of these views of God would be compatible with Christian proclamation of the

Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Concerning Old Testament narrative pericopes, the issue of definition of terms

must take center stage at the outset. The first question is easily posed: What is a

narrative? An initial definition is offered by Tremper Longman: "Prose narrative is

closer to ordinary speech than poetry and is structured by paragraphs rather than by

lines and stanzas. . . . Narration suggests a communication process in which the

narrative as message is transmitted by addresser to addressee and emphasizes that

there is a succession of events."[6] Furthermore, while there are narrative texts in the

New Testament as well (e.g., the Gospels' stories about Jesus, or the narrative stories

told as parables), this paper will be limited specifically to Old Testament historical

narratives. These are true stories that narrate God's work of judgment and

forgiveness--Law and Gospel--in and among His B.C. people. They are history in that

they retell events that actually occurred. However, more than simply a bald

recounting of facts, narratives are also God's Word about what He did for His people

---

[6]Tremper Longman, III, *Literary Aproaches to Biblical Interpretation*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987), 76.

and for their salvation. In this way, narratives are history, and they are also "His story." As such they help one understand and glorify Him. Yet the preacher is left wondering: "How can proclamation of this divine history help today's people glorify and serve God? If simple (re)telling of the story and identifying with its characters are employed, then the theological import of the passage might be ignored or obscured. Were characters' lives meant to be examples for the faithful in succeeding generations? If so, then how is the text to be applied without moralizing? Were narratives even meant for proclamation?"

Since these stories are not simple narratives but also *Verbum Dei*, the exegete/preacher is ultimately led back to God and His reasons for including a certain pericope in His special revelation. In the case of prophetic oracles, God at times communicates what He wants done, and the prophet fulfills his charge. Of this the prophetic writings testify.[7] With prophetic oracles, the God-given intention and application to the people usually are clear, and may serve to guide the modern-day pastor's proclamation as well. Narratives, though, rarely supply such interpretive clues. One must understand their value as history and seek out the reason why they were written down. This knowledge will guide the preacher in his task. But if he is interested only in preaching essentially Christian sermons that are centered in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, then he must answer several important questions.

---

[7]The clearest examples of this are the commissions of the prophets: Isaiah 6; Jeremiah 1; Zechariah 1:1-6.

Question at Issue and Outline of Approach

This thesis will examine the Old Testament genre of narrative in light of its usefulness for the Christian preacher. It is assumed that the proclaimer's task is, in some way, to say the same thing as what the text says. But the task is more involved than simply paraphrasing or rephrasing the story. The main question at issue may be simply stated: What do narratives *mean*? This is a question of hermeneutics, of the theory of interpretation, of understanding a text's meaning. Indeed, this is the central question for the preacher/exegete who is intent on proclaiming only the specific message of the narrative as Word of God.

Or perhaps this is the wrong question to ask of a narrative: "What does this *mean*?" The actual term "meaning" has been used and abused in so many different ways that its own meaning (!) may no longer be useful. John Barton shares this sentiment:

> Even granted that "meaning" is a difficult word to handle, may it not be that it is being made to work too hard, to cover too many different senses? Is it not possible that the argument is starting to talk itself into a corner, all because "meaning" has now become almost meaningless?[8]

Yet the word "meaning" can still be redeemed for use in the case of narratives.

Closely related to this question of meaning is the issue of the nature of biblical history: Is it an end in itself? For what other purposes were these accounts recorded? Also important is a clear understanding of Hebrew narratives as literature: In what way is recent narrative scholarship helpful for the preacher/exegete? The approach to

---

[1]John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 175.

narrative hermeneutics advocated here will presuppose the central, unifying theme of all Scripture--its "material principle"--to be the Gospel of God's gracious forgiveness won for sinners by the work of Christ. It will also confess the divine inspiration of God's Word as recorded in the same Scripture.

Yet questions of theory are valuable only insofar as they are grounded in concrete examples and application. Thus a sample Hebrew narrative will be examined in the next chapter to provide an illustration for the theoretical discussion of narrative hermeneutics that follows. This sample narrative will be Genesis 32:22-30, the account of Jacob wrestling at the Jabbok river and his subsequent name-change to "Israel" and blessing. This seemingly obscure lection was chosen for several reasons: its unique literary aspects as a narrative, its prominence in the literature of Hebrew narrative specialists, its selection for the three-year lectionary (on the Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost, Series C), and its difficulties and potential pitfalls for the preacher. Thus the first task will be to do the basic exegetical work. This step is fundamental--for this thesis and for narrative interpretation in general--in that it establishes the basic meaning of the words, sentences and paragraphs for the purpose of their interpretation as a narrative.

The next chapter will then survey the history of Christian proclamation of Hebrew narratives, focusing especially on Martin Luther and his contribution to the exegetical interpretation of narratives. It will be shown that there are several factors present today that influence the pastor to avoid Hebrew narratives as a basis for Christian sermons. These influences will be traced back to two prominent sources:

the allegorical school of interpretation and the rationalistic higher-critical method of interpretation. Luther's understanding of Old Testament narratives as examples of God's actions in the deliverance of His people and also as examples of His people struggling to live out their faith will be Luther's main contribution here; narratives serve as examples of justification and sanctification. An examination of Luther's Christological approach will advance the thesis that Hebrew narratives are valuable as Scripture only as they are interpreted in light of the Gospel. Then several prominent contemporary approaches to narrative interpretation will be presented, including structuralism and reader-response analysis. In this way the historical overview will supply both the main antagonists and a preliminary response for a contemporary Christian hermeneutic for Hebrew narrative proclamation.

The main question of the *meaning of narratives* will be addressed in Chapter Four. The approach to this issue will be by means of four theses for narrative interpretation. Each will be explained in light of the sample narrative (Genesis 32) and defended against the main antagonists mentioned earlier. These theses will suggest to the Christian preacher a general approach to all Hebrew narratives to facilitate their clear proclamation as messages of Law and Gospel within the Divine Service. The theses are not intended, however, as a step-by-step guideline or homiletical formulary for sermon preparation. Rather, they focus on the hermeneutical questions unique to the genre of narrative: Of what value for the Christian is the history they recount? What benefit is there in studying narratives as *literature*? In what context(s) are narratives to be interpreted? The literal meaning of narratives

together with its theological significance will be upheld as the primary concern of the narrative interpreter.

The final chapter will briefly address the homiletical issues of moving from narrative text to sermon. Several sermonic methods will be evaluated in light of the hermeneutical approach defended in the previous chapter. The starting point, though, is not with homiletics, but with hermeneutics. To set the stage for this discussion, the text of the sample narrative from Genesis 32 will be presented, thus supplying the concrete framework in which the various questions and approaches may be posed.

CHAPTER TWO

EXEGESIS OF GENESIS OF 32:23-31

The first step in any narrative interpretation is to study the text itself. Only with a clear understanding of the individual words and sentences can their use in the larger narrative passages be considered. This chapter provides an original translation of the pericope with textual notes and some interpretive comments on the account of Jacob wrestling at the Jabbok river.

In the case of Genesis 32:23-31 the results of this exegetical method may be summarized briefly. In establishing the text, variant readings are found to be few and relatively inconsequential. They will be discussed in connection with the translation notes. What is more important, the interpreter should notice that the pericope has been cut short and should therefore include the final two verses of chapter 32. This completes the narrative of the attack on Jacob at the Jabbok. Further verses could be added to round out the pericope (e.g., the rest of chapter 32), but for the sake of limiting the text to a manageable size only verses 23-33 will be considered in detail (though the rest of the chapter is certainly valuable as context).

An original translation may now be offered, with the results of Hebrew word and idiom studies included and annotated. Verse references in parentheses are to the Hebrew versification of Genesis 32; English translation will be one less. Superscript

capital letters refer to the comments on the Hebrew text.

(23) He [Jacob] arose in that[A] same night and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford[B] of the Jabbok.[C] (24) He took them and sent them across the wadi; and he sent across that which was his.[D] (25) And so[E] Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled[F] with him until the crack of the dawn.[G] (26) When he saw that he could not overcome him, he touched the hollow of his hip[H] so that the hollow of Jacob's hip was sprained as he wrestled with him.

(27) Then he said, "Release me, for the dawn is rising."

But he replied, "I will not let you go unless[J] you bless me."

(28) Then he said to him, "What is your name?"[J]

And he said, "Jacob."

(29) Then he said, "Your name will no longer be called Jacob, but[K] Israel, because you have struggled[L] with God and with men and have overcome."

(30) Then Jacob asked and said, "So then[M] tell your name."

But he replied, "Why indeed[N] do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

(31) So Jacob called the name of the place "Peniel,"[N] "For[P] I saw God face to face and yet my life was rescued."[Q] (32) The sun rose over him as he passed Penuel; and he was limping because of his thigh. (33) Therefore the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip even to this day; for he touched the hollow of the thigh of Jacob on the sinew of the hip.

Hebrew Translation Notes

V. 23. **He [Jacob] arose in that[A] night and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford[B] of the Jabbok.[C]**

A. The anarthrous demonstrative pronoun *hw'* ("that") is unusual. The Samaritan Pentateuch reads with the definite article *h*. The only other occurrences of this in Genesis are at 19:33 and 30:16, both of which are footnoted in like manner. Waltke-O'Connor lists it as a "quasi-demonstrative," labeling it "anomalous and textually suspect."[1] A better explanation might be simple haplography: scribal error accounts for the loss of the definite article *h* between the final *h* of *blylh* ("in a

---

[1]Bruce Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 17.5b. (Hereafter referred to as *W-O*)

night") and the demonstrative pronoun *hw'* ("that"). The demonstrative force should

be retained, and following *blylh hhw'* ("in that night") in verse 22, the sense here

might be "in that same night."

B. The cognate accusative *m^cbr* (with the verb *wy^cbr*) could be similarly

rendered in English "and crossed the crossing place of the Jabbok," though "ford" is

more descriptive of what was likely a shallow point in the river.

C. The Samaritan Pentateuch adds the definite article to *ybq* ("Jabbok") which

would not significantly change the sense of the passage.

V. 24. He took them and sent them across the wadi; and he sent across that which was his.^D

D. Concerning the second clause, the Samaritan Pentateuch, one Hebrew

manuscript, and the versions add *kol* ("all") before the relative (cf. LXX *panta ta autou*

["all his things"]). The two possibilities here are indeed similar, and though the

variant is well supported by manuscript evidence, the sense of the MT is clear without

the addition.

V. 25. And so^E Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled^F with him until the rising of the dawn.^G

E. The *waw*-consecutive is most often used to connect situations that are

temporally or logically succeeding.[2] As such the best translation may be a simple

"and," "then," "so," or some combination of these main-line conjunctions.

F. "A man wrestled with him." This exceedingly rare verb (attested only in

the Niphal *wayyē'ābēq*) appears only one other time in the Old Testament (and that

---

[2] *W-O* 33.2.1.

within this pericope, in vs. 26, immediately following). As such, it lacks other verbal

stems as a point of reference to determine the force of the Niphal.[3] The lexicon of

Brown, Driver and Briggs makes the etymological connection of this verb to the noun

'ābāq ("dust"; cf. Exodus 9:9; Deuteronomy 28:24), thus suggesting the verb's meaning

to be "to get dusty, roll in the dust."[4] It might have been chosen for the sake of its

aural similarity to *yabōq* ("Jabbok") and *ya͑ăqōb* ("Jacob").

G. This idiom--"the rising of the dawn"--occurs 8 times in the O.T., 3 of

which are in Genesis (19:15; 32:25, 27). *ša ḥ ar* (24 times in O.T.) refers to the "light

before dawn," "daybreak," or perhaps colloquially "the crack of dawn." Here the

clearest translation would be "He wrestled with him until the crack of dawn."

> V. 26. **When he saw that he could not overcome him, he touched the hollow of his hip**[11] **so that the hollow of Jacob's hip was sprained**[1] **as he wrestled with him.**

H. Where was Jacob "touched"? *yārēk* refers to the "upper thigh, hip";

together with *kap* it can be translated "hollow of the upper thigh" or perhaps "hip

socket." The thigh is also the biblical metaphor for physical procreation (Genesis

46:26). It is also the place under which one taking an oath places his hand (Genesis

24:2, 9; 47:29), indicating the long-standing effect of the oath on one's progeny.[5]

Thus, the wrestler touched Jacob's hip joint.

---

[3]The designation of *W-O* 23.5a is "Isolated Niphal."

[4]Francis Brown, S. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1906, 1951), 7. (Hereafter *BDB*)

[5]For this view, see V. Hamp, " *ḥ ᵃlātsayim: mothnayim: yārēk: kesel,*" *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 4:441-443. (Hereafter *TDOT*)

I. *tēqaʿ* (from *yqʿ*) appears only 7 times in the O.T., 3 in the Qal stem as here

(cf. Jeremiah 6:8; Ezekiel 23:17, both meaning "turn away with a jerk" in the

metaphorical sense of sudden alienation). Its meaning is uncertain here, though

probably "sprain" or "strain" would be better than "dislocate," since, humanly

speaking, walking away with a dislocated hip with only a limp (vs. 32 *ṣ lʿ*) would not

seem possible, let alone continuing to wrestle and converse with an opponent.

> Vv. 27-28. **Then he said, "Release me, for the dawn is rising." But he replied, "I will not let you go unless[^J] you bless me." Then he said to him, "What is your name?" and he said, "Jacob."**

J. *kî 'im* is translated as an exceptive clause, "unless."[6] Gesenius-Kautzsch

notes its use with the perfect after a declaration in the imperfect, and translates: "I

will not let thee go, except thou hast *previously* blessed me."[7] Other supporting

instances cited include Leviticus 22:6; Isaiah 55:10; 65:6; Amos 3:7 and Ruth 3:18.

The meaning of "previously" in this context is not clearly explained in Gesenius-

Kautzsch, though it could imply that Jacob is attempting to determine the attacker's

identity: "I will not let you go, unless you are the one who has already blessed me."

The supporting references given in Gesenius-Kautzsch are also inconclusive. While

this translation can be plausibly explained and is attractive in that it emphasizes

Jacob's reliance on the blessing previously received, it falters on Gesenius-Kautzsch's

over-reliance on a clear temporal distinction between the perfect and the imperfect.[8]

---

[6] *W-O* 38.6b.

[7] E. Kautzsch, ed. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd English Edition, rev. by A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 163c, p. 500, emphasis original. (Hereafter *G-K*)

[8] *W-O* 20.2d-e.

The regular sense of "unless" is to be preferred.

V. 29. Then he said, "Your name will no longer be called Jacob, but[K] Israel, because you have struggled[L] with God and with men and have overcome."

K. *ky 'm-yśr'l* is an instance of omission or "gapping,"[9] that is, the verb and subject from the first clause are understood also as part of the second clause: *ky 'm* [*y'mr šmk*] *yśr'l* ("but instead [your name will be called] Israel").

L. The only other O.T. uses of *śrh* are at Hosea 12:4-5 (a passage which discusses this same encounter). From its context there the sense of "striving," "contending," or "struggling" is clear. Thus the common etymologies of "Israel" as either "he strives with God" or "God strives." (On this question, see below.)

V. 30. Then Jacob asked and said, "So then[M] tell your name." But he replied, "Why indeed[N] do you ask my name?" And he blessed him there.

M. *hgydh-n'* ("So then tell") The particle *n'* added to the imperative (which has volitive *h*) is generally referred to as a precative particle and translated "please,"[10] though Waltke-O'Connor follows the suggestion of Lambdin identifying it as a logical particle that is better left untranslated. While the precative sense certainly has merit here (and is followed by the English versions), Waltke-O'Connor/Lambdin's recommendation of the logical use is convincing, especially in the immediate context of Jacob having just answered the question "what is your name?" and consequently receiving his new name "Israel." It may be rendered "So then, tell your name."

N. The demonstrative *zh* is translated as emphatic with the exclamatory

---

[9] *W-O* 11.4.3d.

[10] *W-O* 34.7; *G-K* 20f. The particle may at times also be left untranslated.

question.[11] A modern equivalent might be rendered, "Why in the world do you ask

my name?" or more literally, "Why this (question) that you ask for my name?"

> **Vv. 31-33. So Jacob called the name of the place "Peniel,"[O] "For[P] I saw God face to face and my life was rescued."[Q] The sun rose over him as he passed Penuel; and he was limping because of his thigh. Therefore the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip even to this day; for he touched the hollow of the thigh of Jacob on the sinew of the hip.**

O. Elsewhere this place-name is always spelled "Penuel" (*p*ᵉ*nû'ēl*) (cf. vs. 32;

Judges 8:8-9, 17; 1 Kings 12:25). "Peniel" (*p*ᵉ*nî'ēl*) literally means "face of God," and

perhaps is spelled this different way here to emphasize the connection with the

ensuing explanation, "I saw God face to face (*pānîm 'el-pānîm*)." Waltke-O'Connor

(8.2b) suggests that "Penuel" is a remnant of the old nominative plural ending -*û*,

while "Peniel" is a byform containing the old genitive-accusative plural ending. The

Samaritan Pentateuch, Symmachus version, Syrian and Vulgate substitution of

"Penuel" for "Peniel" in this verse seems to be a standardization of the name's

spelling; MT is to be preferred as the more difficult reading that is also better-attested.

P. The shift from third person narration to first person discourse is sudden and

unexpected. Most modern translations add "saying" to ease the transition: "So Jacob

called the name of the place 'Peniel,' saying 'For I have seen. . . .'"[12] Nahum Sarna[13]

suggests an understanding of this phrase as an unintroduced quotation similar to

Genesis 4:24 and 41:51, and translates *kî* as "meaning" ("so Jacob named the place

---

[11]*W-O* 17.4.3c; cf. Genesis 27:20; 1 Kings 21:5.

[12]RSV (emphasis added); so NRSV, NASB, NIV.

[13]*Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 228.

'Peniel,' meaning 'I saw God. . . .'"). This would help to clarify the sense of the verse, though it is also possible to understand the *kî* in its customary causal sense and leave the abrupt transition from third to first person unexplained: "So Jacob named the place 'Peniel,' 'For I saw God. . . .'"

Q. The *waw* of *wtnn s̆ l* ("and it was saved") indicates a logical relation of contrast,[14] and is translated "and yet [my life] was rescued."

Interpretation Notes

It is clear that the translation of this passage is relatively straightforward. The vocabulary and syntax pose only minor problems. The _interpretation_ of this pericope, however, is decidedly more difficult than the translation. Numerous questions could be posed: What was the purpose of the assault? What was the identity of the assailant? How could the attacker's "touch" inflict such long-lasting disablement? What is the meaning of the name "Israel"? The text supplies few details, leaving much open to speculation. Thus, more questions could certainly be posed, including, why is the account so shrouded in mystery? What function does it play as a narative in the greater narrative? Why is it in this particular place? The answers to these questions necessarily cross the boundaries of isagogical information, theological context, and language of the text. Since an exhaustive exegesis of this passage would prove both difficult and prohibitively lengthy (and would be beyond the purpose of this paper), the results may be summarized.

---

[14] *W-O* 33.2.1d; cf. Judges 1:35.

The purpose and identity of the assailant are closely linked. The person is initially described as simply an ' îš--"a man." Only later does Jacob proclaim (vs. 31), "I have seen God face to face." The important passage from Hosea (12:4-6 ET 3-5) makes the same observation:

> In the womb he [Jacob] grasped the heel [ʿqb] of his brother, and as a man he struggled [śrh] with God. He struggled [wyśr] with the angel [mlʾk] and was victorious, he wept [bkh] and begged for his favor; at Bethel he found him and spoke with him there. And Yahweh the God of Hosts, Yahweh is his name.

Though some have chosen to identify the opponent as some sort of river demon or Canaanite numen, or even Esau,[15] it is clear from verse 31 of the text that the antagonist here is none other than an earthly manifestation of God Himself. Perhaps Jacob had already recognized this when he demanded a blessing (though the divine nature of the one blessing is in no way necessitated here[16]). Perhaps he also recognized the inherent danger in this situation, for the "rising of the dawn" would have allowed Jacob to see clearly his adversary (a danger that was later explained in Exodus 33:20: Yahweh said, "You cannot see my face, for no one can see me and live"). Thus Jacob proclaims his astonishment at surviving by naming the place "Peniel."[17]

---

[15]For these and other suggestions, see W. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, Interpretation Commentary (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 266-67; B. Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977), 349.

[16]C. W. Mitchell, *The Meaning of* BRK *"To Bless" in the Old Testament*, SBLDS 95 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 109.

[17]*pānîm 'el-pānîm* ("face to face") occurs only 4 other times in the OT, all of which refer to encounters with Yahweh: Exodus 33:11 Yahweh spoke with Moses face to face; Deuteronomy 34:10 Yahweh knew Moses face to face; Judges 6:22 Gideon said, "I have seen the angel of Yahweh [mlʾk yhwh] face to face"; Ezekiel 20:35 Yahweh spoke through Ezekiel to the house of Israel, "I will bring you into the desert of the nations and there, face to face, I will execute judgment upon you." The

The purpose of the attack is nowhere announced, so the interpretation of the account must rely on the context(s) of the pericope. In the context of Genesis 32, Jacob is preparing for what he thinks will be a difficult meeting with his twin brother Esau. Jacob had prayed for protection (32:11-13), and the blessing given by the wrestler answered this prayer. Before struggling with Esau, however, Jacob is forced to contend with God, who later confirms His blessing at the conclusion of the confrontation. Thus Jacob is assured of God's favor and protection in his upcoming encounter with Esau.

In the context of the Jacob cycle of narratives (Genesis 25-35), Jacob is seen as one continually at odds with those around him--Esau (even before his birth, 25:22-26), Isaac, Laban, and finally God Himself. The divine intervention narrated here was the actual physical outworking of Jacob's lifelong inclination toward struggling with others. By reissuing the blessing that was already his (28:13-15 at Bethel), God's miraculous actions led Jacob to realize the wrongs of his previous way of life, and the gracious blessing of forgiveness given to cover those wrongs. He is now prepared to meet and be reconciled with Esau.

In the context of Genesis, the theme of covenant blessing is prominent in its restatement here. Seen in light of the blessing of Abram (Genesis 12), the struggle and eventual blessing of Genesis 32 can be seen as God's gracious implementation of

---

nearly synonymous *pānim b'pānim* ("face to face") occurs only at Deuteronomy 5:4: Moses said to Israel,"At Horeb . . . Yahweh spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain." See also Judges 6:22-23; Genesis 16:7, 13. Cf. I Corinthians 13:12 "Now we see dimly as in a mirror, then shall we see face to face."

the covenant provisions, here especially the promise of descendants.[18] Jacob had

prepared for (renewed) conflict with Esau, but God intervened so as to maintain the

line of fulfillment of His covenant. Jacob himself becomes the namesake ("Israel") of

the "great nation" promised to Abram (12:2).

The meaning of Jacob's newly-given name "Israel" is also important for the

interpretation of this passage. Indeed, the enigmatic nature of the wrestling match

suggests that the main thing of this narrative is in fact its result: the name-change and

blessing, both given by God to Jacob. Christoper Mitchell comments on this event:

> In the patriarchal narratives God several times blesses by bestowing new names in
> conjunction with issuing the blessing promises (Gen 17:5, 15, 19; cf. 32:27-29,
> and 2:3; 5:2; Exod 20:11). The significance of the renaming is that it denotes
> conferral of a new status. It marks the entrance of the patriarchs into a
> relationship with God in which they will be the recipients of the promised
> blessings. The act of renaming is more important than the meaning of the new
> names. While the blessings were still only promises, the new names were
> tangible benefits that the patriarchs received immediately to help assure them of
> God's future blessings.[19]

God asks Jacob what his name is so as to remind him of what he is and what he has

done ("Jacob" *ya^{ca}qōb* = "supplanter, deceiver, cheater"; cf. Genesis 25:26; 27:36). In

contrast, his new name is explained in the text by both the namer and the named:

". . . 'Israel,' for you have struggled with God and with man and have overcome." Yet

the question is not easily decided as to whether this meaning of *yśr'l* as "contender

with God" is correct as opposed to the meaning "God contends." Perhaps the second

---

[18]David Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* JSOT Supp. 10 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1978), 29; so also idem, "Story and Poem: The Old Testament as Literature and Scripture," in *Beyond Form Criticism*, Paul House, ed. (SBTS 2; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 32-33.

[19]C. Mitchell, *Meaning of BRK*, 35; cf. 109.

is also intended here, though the first seems clearly dominant as a result of the textual

explanation. In either case, *the fact that* God gave him this name and blessed him is

predominant and highlights the gracious nature of God as a *giver*, for it is God who is

intent on fulfilling His promises (in Genesis 32 promises of blessing) even in spite of

the sinfully rebellious nature of the recipients (here depicted in the character of

"Jacob" the deceiver). This accords well with a material principle of Scripture as the

Gospel. It also highlights the theological nature of narratives over against the

tendency to see them primarily as human-centered stories with which to identify and

compare.

Is this the text's *meaning*: God fulfills His promise of blessing at times even in

spite of us? Or is this a theological *implication*? What is the enduring meaning of the

fact that Jacob wrestled with God and was blessed by Him? Is this simply a historical

account of an actual event, or does it have a further significance and application for

those who read or hear it later? Further definition of what is meant by "meaning" and

"implication" is needed (and will be supplied in Chapter Four after discussion of their

historical usages, Chapter Three). Though the Hosea 12 passage does mention Jacob

as weeping and begging for favor, the tendency on the part of numerous commentators

and expositors to make application of Genesis 32 solely to the Christian's prayer life is

to be challenged.[20] Though certainly a plausible *homiletical* application of "wrestling,"

prayer *per se* is not mentioned in the pericope. Its own "interpretation" is given by the

---

[20]Note here also the lectionary use of this pericope for the Twenty-second Sunday after
Pentecost, Series C, where it is paired with the parable of the Importunate Widow (Luke 19), thus
changing its interpretive context from the Genesis narrative focusing on blessing and fulfillment of
promise, to one of Christian life and sanctification.

narrator in verse 33[32]: "Therefore the sons of Israel do not eat the sinew of the hip even to this day; for he touched the hollow of the thigh of Jacob on the sinew of the hip." Some interpreters would easily discredit this verse as an "aetiological note" added later so as to explain the origin of the sanctuary at Peniel, or of a certain dietary practice.[21] Contemporary application of this textual interpretation is markedly more difficult than the customary exhortation to prayer.[22] This question will be revisited in Chapter Four.

The final question, therefore, is difficult to answer: What is the meaning of this narrative? Is it that God fulfills His promises at times even in spite of us? Or is this *implication*, with *meaning* being something else? The preacher/exegete needs an answer upon which to base his sermon, unless he chooses to ignore the text and proclaim something else. What specifically should (could) he preach? Is it proper to proclaim the persistence with which we must also wrestle with God for a blessing? . . . or perhaps the level of fervor and zeal in the Christian prayer life? . . . a discussion of proper dietary customs? . . . an encouragement to maintain a high level of physical fitness (so as to be ready in case a similar wrestler befalls you)? Or do all of these questions miss the (exegetical) mark? Which one points to the real *meaning* of the text?

This is the question which the remainder of this thesis will attempt to answer.

---

[21]J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* (Amsterdam: Vangorcum, 1975), 210. Fokkelman adds, "This aetiological note does not affect what follows and hardly affects what precedes, forms no part of the action and may be ignored. . . ."

[22]Perhaps as an acknowledgment of this fact, verse 32 is not included in the lectionary reading of this pericope.

Further clarification of the *meaning of narrative* for the Christian preacher is possible

via a close examination of the hermeneutical presuppositions involved in this task.

But first, a historical survey of this question in general and in specific as it relates to

this sample narrative will serve to set the current debate in context of its long-standing

roots.

CHAPTER THREE

LUTHER AND OTHER NARRATIVE INTERPRETERS

In seeking help to answer our question of the meaning of Hebrew narratives, we turn to those before us and the answers they have given. Since this thesis aims to present a Lutheran hermeneutic for these texts, the work of Martin Luther as he deals with this question will figure prominently in this chapter. His Christological, Gospel-centered view will also be influential in the four theses for narrative hermeneutics presented in the next chapter. However, a Lutheran view of narratives need not have its beginning and ending solely in the works of Luther! Therefore, the views of those who have come and gone before and after Luther will also be considered, albeit in summary fashion.

Controversy and disagreement over the meaning of Old Testament narratives is certainly nothing new. Christian proclamation of the Hebrew Bible has had a checkered history from the very beginning; this is evident already in the early Christian Church. The New Testament bears witness to this problem: One group held that Gentile converts had to be circumcised and follow the Jewish law to the letter, while the other group maintained that all Christians, Jew and Gentile alike, were free

from the bonds of the law.[1] Disagreement over the interpretation and contemporary application of the sacred record was the cause of this conflict.

This debate has never been totally resolved. The Church has argued its resolution ever since the question was first posed: What is the authority of the Law and the Prophets?[2] Or, more narrowly stated for the purpose of this paper: What has the contemporary Christian's story to do with the stories of the Old Testament? Several answers have been proposed and rejected.

The Solution of Marcion

Marcion's difficulty with the Old Testament was that its narratives bore witness to the history of a strange, alien god of wrath and destruction. This did not agree with his belief in the loving, redeeming God revealed in the New Testament. The solution he adopted was to remove the offending parts of the Bible (including the entire Old Testament). In other words, Marcion eliminated the verses that troubled him most.

It is evident from his writings that Marcion entertained a dualistic understanding of God.[3] For him the Old Testament bore witness to a capricious deity,

---

[1] Williston Walker, R. Norris, D. Lotz, R. Handy, *A History of the Christian Church*. Fourth ed. (New York: Scribners, 1985), 26-27. Especially see Acts 15 (the Jerusalem Council) and Galatians 2-3 (Paul's confrontation of Peter).

[2] This is the form of the question as treated by John Bright in *The Authority of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967), wherein he gives a clear defense and explanation of the value of the Old Testament for the Christian, and especially for the Christian preacher.

[3] The most comprehensive treatment is that of Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion. Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott* (2nd ed.; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs Verlag, 1924; reprinted, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1960); recently translated by John Steely and Lyle Bierma, *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1990). For a briefer treatment in English, see E. C. Blackman, *Marcion and His Influence* (London: S.P.C.K., 1948).

the "creator God," whom Marcion identified as an evil Demiurge.[4] The New

Testament deity, the supreme God, was a God of redemption who worked in and

through Jesus Christ. The implications of such a dualistic view for the preachers

influenced by him are plain: avoidance of the Hebrew Scriptures as a basis for

preaching and teaching. Especially endangered by his views were the narratives, those

sections which revealed the violent and vindictive actions of the Hebrew's deity. The

Old Testament remained relevant for its moral examples or its strictly literary value

(both of which were important for Marcion, especially the poetry of the Psalter or the

ethical exhortations of the prophets), but any appeal to the promise-fulfillment motif

so prevalent in Jesus' and the Apostles' preaching[5] was dismissed out of hand as

absurd; the Old Testament stories testified of an "alien God"!

Though Marcion and his views were quickly denounced and later formally

rejected by the church as heretical,[6] his ideas survived as late as the fifth century.[7]

They appeared again in the Middle Ages,[8] the Reformation, and after. The reason for

---

[4]E. C. Blackman, 114.

[5]The motif of promise-fulilment is clear in the sermons of Peter (Acts 2:14-36; 3:11-26; 4:8-12), Stephen (Acts 7:4-53), and Paul (Acts 13:16-48).

[6]He was excommunicated from his church in Rome in 144 and was refuted by such polemicists as Irenaeus (*Againsts Heresies*) and Tertullian (five book entitled *Against Marcion*), among others (Walker, *History*, 67, 81).

[7]E. C. Blackman, *Marcion*, 4: "As late as the middle of the fifth century Theodoret, Bishop of Cyprus, boasts (*Ep.* 113) of 'freeing from the disease of Marcion' over a thousand souls; elsewhere (*Ep.* 81) he mentions Marcionite villages, eight of which he had brought back to the true faith"; cf. Walker (*History*, 67) who notes an especially strong presence of Marcionites in Syria well into the fifth century.

[8]Likely as a result of contact with eastern dualistic heretics, the Cathars (a.k.a. "Albigenses," similar to the "Bogomils" of the same period) adopted a similar mitigated dualism and became a threat to the 12th and 13th century church. Walker notes (*History*, 305): "Some [of the Cathars] rejected the Old Testament entirely as the work of the evil power, identifying Yahweh with Satan."

this recent (sixteenth-seventeenth century) resurgence was the emphasis placed on interpreting Scripture from its plain, <u>literal</u> sense. Since no recourse to allegorical or spiritual interpretation was allowed, difficulties arose when this literal sense seemed unreasonable. Indeed, Marcion's difficulty with the Old Testament stemmed from his inability to incorporate the "alien" accounts recorded there. The result was that the reason for the seeming inconsistencies was assigned to God. Williston Walker notes, "Rather than taking the Law and the Prophets as symbols and forshadowings of the Christian dispensation, he insisted on reading them literally."[9] John Bright has aptly summarized, "To read the Old Testament in its literal meaning is to see it in its strangeness; and to see it in its strangeness is to raise again the question of Marcion."[10]

Many scholars since then have questioned this "strangeness," following down this path asking the same questions Marcion had asked and, unfortunately, arriving at similar conclusions. These people included Adolf von Harnack,[11] Rudolf Bultmann,[12]

---

[9]W. Walker, *History*, 68.

[10]J. Bright, *Authority*, 63.

[11]The primary scholar of Marcion and his work, he also espoused the Marcionite views: "To have rejected the Old Testament in the second century was a mistake that the main body of the church was correct in avoiding; to retain it in the sixteenth century was a historical fate that the Reformation was not yet in a position to escape; but to go on conserving it within Protestantism as a canonical authority after the nineteenth century is the consequence of a paralysis of religion and church" (Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion. Das Evangelium*, 217, cited by Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Melody of Theolgy: A Philosophical Dictionary* [London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988], 113).

[12]Though not a proponent of excising the Old Testament from the canon of Scripture, he nevertheless promoted its position as secondary to (or perhaps strictly *preparatory* for) the New Testament. These views are discussed in *The Old Testament and the Christian Faith*, B. W. Anderson, ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), where see especially Bultmann's article, "The Significance of the Old Testament for the Christian Faith" (pp. 8-35).

Soren Kierkegaard,[13]

Friedrich Schleiermacher,[14] and culminated in Friedrich Delitzsch,[15] all of whom were

very influential in the education of prospective clergy and, through them, in the

instruction of the people. In these last two, the devaluation of the Old Testament

suggested by Marcion reached its full fruition as the religion (and god) of Israel was

placed on a level of equal stature with heathenism. As in the case of Marcion himself

the resulting views of the Old Testament held by clergy under their tutelage led to its

final devaluation as simply another literary specimen. These views were then

communicated to the parishioners as well. Thus Marcionism has had a long history in

the church and remains influential in various forms to this day, as is true also in the

case of Origen.

The Solution of Origen

What does one do when large sections of Scripture are seen as totally irrelevant

---

[13]The great Danish theologian supplied the base upon which Emanuel Hirsch (*Das Alte Testament und die Predigt des Evangeliums* [Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1936]) built his fierce attacks on the Old Testament during the Nazi years of Germany. J. Bright (*Authority*, 67-8) notes that Hirsch was not a propagandist (though he was himself a Nazi), but rather built his case against the Old Testament on theological grounds similar to those of Marcion (Old Testament as law, discontinuous from the religion of the New Testament, etc.). On the inner cover of his book Hirsch quotes Kierkegaard: "The more pious aberrations in Christianity have a common relationship to the fact that the Old Testament has been elevated to the same level as the New."

[14]Although Schleiermacher granted that there existed a special relationship between the two testaments, he viewed the Old Testament as an historical book, better suited to the apocrypha: "The Old Testament Scriptures do not . . . share the normative dignity or the inspiration of the New" (*The Christian Faith*, 2nd ed., H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart, trans. [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928], paragraph 132 [pp. 608-11]).

[15]J. Bright (*Authority*, 66) summarizes Friedrich Delitzsch (the son of Franz D., eminent 19th c. Old Testament scholar who is well-known for his published commentaries): "[He] was Marcionist in the fullest sense, even to the point of denying that Yahweh, God of Israel, is to be identified with the Christian's God: the making of such an identification is itself 'the great deception.'"

for the Christian? . . . when there would seem to be no clear application of a certain

narrative to the people of today? Certainly the Messianic prophecies are important,

and the poetry of the psalter is exquisite devotional material, but what about the

lengthy genealogical lists, or the extensive rubrics for Levitical sacrifice? Another

way to resolve the problem of Old Testament (ir)relevance was proposed by Origen (b.

185 A.D.): Search for the deeper, spiritual meaning(s) in the text via the allegorical

method.

This method of interpretation did not originate with Origen. It was prominent

already in Judaism, most notably in Philo and the rabbis. Origen merely applied his

combined Christian training (under the guidance of both Clement of Alexandria and

his father) and Neo-Platonic education (under the same teacher who taught Plotinus) to

the area of Christian training and proclamation, resulting in the proclamation of a

spiritual meaning found behind the literal text. At this task he was without equal. He

has even been called (by some) "the first great Bible preacher and expositor"[16] and

"the Father of Christian preaching."[17] Others have noted that his "most significant gift

to the churches was the principle . . . of *sola scriptura.*"[18] For Origen, however,

allegory in preaching and teaching was no mere exercise in fanciful imagination or

---

[16]Hugh T. Kerr, *Preaching in the Early Church* (New York: Revell Co., 1942), 110.

[17]J. Ker, *Lectures on the History of Preaching* (New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1889), 63. This latter appellation no doubt arose partly because Origen is one of the earliest preachers with extant sermons available for study, leading to the disproportionate influence accorded his work. The bulk of these sermons are from the daily services at which he preached in Caesarea. These were services especially for the catechumens and included a reading from the Old Testament together with its explanation (the sermon).

[18]W. Walker, *History*, 90.

wild speculation (as is often his caricature); he saw it as a careful process of prayerful and exacting study of Scripture guided by the Spirit for the purpose of unfolding the richness of the divine revelation.[19] Of this, Origen was convinced.

To a certain, limited extent this practice is still sound homiletical advice today, especially when a text is obscure and the "deeper, spiritual meaning" (the text's actual meaning itself) is brought to light through other, clearer texts of Scripture. As was patently true in the case of Origen and others, abuse of this search for meaning(s) is still common today. Common examples occur when a text is seen as being (potentially) too offensive so as to require a different, deeper meaning, or when a (pre)text is employed for the purpose of extended moralism or other extraneous exhortation (more on these phenomena in Chapter Five). However, it is dubious at best to identify a "hidden meaning" or "deeper spiritual understanding" in any text, especially one which has a clear intended sense. The interpretive practice of overlooking this clear meaning in favor of other preconceived notions or proclamation thus can trace its lineage through the method of Origen.

Others of that day influenced by Origen include many prominent Greek[20] as

---

[19]Origen understood St. Paul's testimony in 2 Corinthians 3:6 ("The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life") and Galatians 4:21-31 (Scripture's only use of *allāgoreo*, in the context of Hagar/Sarah and the two covenants) as the mandate for identifying three levels of interpretation: the literal, the moral, and the spiritual. These he identifies and explains in his treatment of the three decks of Noah's ark: "The literal meaning which preceded is placed first as a kind of foundation at the lower levels. This mystical [spiritual] interpretation was second, being higher and loftier. Let us attempt to add a moral exposition as the third level. . . ." (R. E. Heine, trans., *Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus* [Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1981], 85, from Genesis Homily II.6).

[20]Most notably the Cappadocian Fathers, ca. late fourth century (Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus, cf. J. Ker, *Lectures*, 75).

well as Latin preachers: Cyprian,[21] Ambrose,[22] and Jerome,[23] to name but a few.

Augustine was also influenced by this method, especially in his numerous homilies on

the Old Testament (the Psalms in particular), though to a lesser degree than the

majority of his contemporaries.

The allegorical approach continued to be prominent among preachers on into

the Middle Ages (although the art of preaching experienced an overall decline from

the high point it enjoyed in Augustine and Chrysostom on down through the twelfth-

thirteenth centuries).[24] It was at this time that the clergy began to be better instructed,

thus facilitating better exegetical and preaching skills.

---

[21]Bishop of Carthage, Cyprian (200-258) is credited with introducing oratory into the preaching of the Western Church, and is also said to have edited a phraseological dictionary of Cicero for the use of Christian preachers (cf. J. Ker, *Lectures*. 100).

[22]Bishop of Milan, Ambrose (340-397) was known as a preacher of "endless and lawless allegories" (J. Ker, *Lectures*. 102), and thus naturally preferred the Old Testament as being more interesting (cf. H. T. Kerr, *Preaching*. 207). He is most noted for his role in the conversion of Augustine, whom he (Ambrose) helped to resolve his (Marcionite) difficulties with the Old Testament (which were a result of his sojourn with Manichaeanism), as Walker notes (*History*. 199).

[23]A thorough scholar of Latin, Greek and Hebrew, Jerome (ca. 345-419) was bound up in the spirit of allegorization. In treating the miracle of the Shunamite lad he says, "Unless Christ sleep with us and rests with us in death, we have no strength to receive the warmth of eternal life" (H. T. Kerr, 196). Walker also notes (*History*. 161) that Jerome was a primary translator of Origen's works into Latin.

[24]The realization of this decline prompted Charlemagne (742-814) to direct his preachers/ theologians to prepare a collection of sermons, known as "Homiliarium," for distribution to the clergy. Unfortunately, these did little to improve preaching skills. since all that was required under this system was an ability to read Latin (the language of the learned, not the vernacular--a further bane to the common people). These sermons were assigned for reading on certain days of the year (a precursor to the modern pericopic system, and the accompanying sermon helps). No doubt this was but a "finger in the hole of the bursting dam" of deteriorating clerical preaching skills: the few who knew how to preach soon lost the skill when directed simply to read a prescribed manuscript (J. Ker, *Lectures*. 116-20).

Luther and the Reformation

Luther was both an exegete and a preacher. For him, the task of interpretation and exposition was hardly reducible to quantifiable matters of things academic; preaching was a task for the man who was both <u>scholar</u> and <u>pastor</u>. These two aspects of the *Prediglamt*, for Luther, were closely related if not inseparable.

A similarly close relationship is evident in Luther's understanding of the <u>sermon</u> and the <u>divine service</u>. The two are essentially united. Such is in evidence throughout his writings on the reform of the liturgy.[25] In his 1526 "The German Mass and Order of Service,"[26] he states, "Since the preaching and teaching of God's Word is the most important part of the divine service, we have arranged for sermons and lessons as follows: For the holy day or Sunday we retain the customary Epistles and Gospels and have three sermons."[27] Later he notes that the Old Testament was read, chapter by chapter, and preached at vespers.

As an exegete and preacher of Old Testament <u>narrative</u> texts, Luther shows that his understanding of the close relationship between sermon and service is no less applicable. This is the main issue for this chapter: Luther as exegete and preacher of Hebrew narratives. The sermon is the main part of the divine service. This

---

[25] In his 1523 "Concerning the Order of Public Worship"(Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, 55 vols., gen. eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman [St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House and Philadelphia: Muhlenberg/Fortress Press, 1955--], 53:7-14 [Hereafter *LW*]), Luther notes, "Now in order to correct these abuses know first of all that a Christian congregation should never gather together without the preaching of God's Word and prayer, no matter how briefly. . . . Therefore when God's Word is not preached, one had better neither sing nor read, or even come together" *LW*, 53:11.

[26] *LW*, 53:51-91.

[27] *LW*, 53:68.

understanding is a result of the fact that the liturgy was a setting in which Luther had been nurtured from his youth[28] and from which his skills of scriptural interpretation had grown and developed.[29] His exegetical work was not done in a vacuum, apart from the concerns for eventual proclamation; rather, his analysis of Hebrew narratives was always with a view to the parishioner attending the divine service, or to the student of theology in the lecture hall.[30]

So then, what was the result of this approach to exegesis? How did he interpret those Old Testament stories? The answer to this question will be sought from Luther himself. It will be shown that he saw the literal meaning of the narrative as being Christologically significant; narratives preach Christ! They are also valuable as examples of how God deals with His people in Law and Gospel ways, and also as examples of the believer's struggle in the faith. In essence, narratives serve as examples of justification and sanctification. The point of analysis will be focused narrowly on one sample narrative text as the basis for interpretation: the Genesis 32 pericope of the patriarch Jacob and his unusual encounter at the Jabbok River. Luther

---

[28]Martin Brecht, *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483-1521*, trans. James Schaaf (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 63-64. [Hereafter *Brecht* I] Here Brecht notes that Luther's life as a monk early on was characterized by strict observance of the canonical hours and prayers, and by a rigid liturgical life that showed little concern for the Bible (*Brecht* I:84, 86). His primary exposure to Scripture came in the daily liturgy; Brecht observes, "During his youth Luther had already come into contact with biblical texts through the liturgy and the lessons of the worship services. . . . Perhaps, intrigued by biblical quotations in the worship services, he had already sought answers in the Bible for the questions that were then troubling him" (*Brecht*, I:85).

[29]On this point Brecht comments, "It was in the tension between the Bible texts employed in worship, chiefly the praying of the psalms, and his *Anfechtungen* that Luther became an interpreter of the Bible" (*Brecht*, I:88).

[30]On the distinction between preaching and biblical exposition, see below, page 40 note 48.

engaged this text three times (from which material was published) for the purpose of

preaching and teaching: 1519,[31] 1523,[32] and 1542.[33] Also, his 1523 "Preface to the

Old Testament"[34] will be considered briefly, as well as his 1525 "How Christians

Should Regard Moses."[35] After considering these works and showing how Luther

identifies their use as examples, the Law/Gospel significance of his understanding of

Hebrew narratives will be shown, as well as the implications for the Divine Service.

Luther's Works: Genesis 32 and Others

Initially Luther followed the traditional method of interpreting Scripture via the

fourfold sense, or "Quadriga": the literal/Christological sense, the allegorical/

ecclesiological sense, the tropological/moral sense, and the anagogical/eschatological

sense. Of these four senses, young Luther stressed the literal or Christological sense

[31]Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke; kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimarer Ausgabe), 9. Band (Weimar: Herman Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883), 413-414. [Hereafter *WA*] Predigten Luthers gesammelt von Joh. Poliander. This type of short (three paragraph) Latin "sermon" is elsewhere referred to as Scholia in librum Genesis (cf. K. Aland, *Hilfsbüch zum Lutherstudien*).

[32]Martin Luther, *Dr. Martin Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften*, herausgegeben von Dr. Joh. Georg Walch, Zweiter Band, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1881), 3:510-519 [Hereafter *St. L.*]; *WA*, 24:573-581. *Auslegung über das erste Buch Mosis: D.M. Luthers Predigten über das 1. Buch Mosis, sammt einem Unterricht, wie Moses zu lehren ist. Gepredigt vom 15. März 1523 bis Herbst 1524: herausgegeben 1527.* One in a series of German sermons on Genesis preached by Luther from March 15, 1523 to April of 1527. Though there is some dispute concerning the several recensions of these sermons (see also the Latin versions, *WA*, 14:433-450 and the respective German and Latin introductions), references to the text will be to the St. Louis (Walch²) edition.

[33]Luther's 1542 *Lectures on Genesis* 32:21-32: *WA*, 44:91-116 (Latin); *St. L.*, 2:770-815 (German); *LW*, 6:125-155 (English).

[34]*LW*, 35:235-251; cf. *WA DB*, 8:11-21. Luther's "Preface to the Old Testament" was actually a preface to the Pentateuch, and was written after he had completed his translation of the Torah.

[35]*WA*, 24:2-16; *St. L.*, 3:2-17; *LW*, 35:157-174. "How Christians Should Regard Moses" was actually the 29th sermon in a series of 77 sermons on Exodus, preached on August 27, 1525.

and the tropological sense, the latter at times by way of the allegorical sense. The

anagogical sense was rarely noted.[36] As a result of the young Luther's Augustinian

view of justification as a progressive process worked by the power of God,[37] Luther

was most interested in the analogy between Christ and man. It was his failure to

attain to this goal (of being progressively justified) that drove Luther to his early

"theology of humility."[38] This is the context in which his first writing on Genesis 32

occurs. Unfortunately, Luther's 1519 Sermon on Genesis 32 lends no specific support

to his emphasis on the theology of humility or Christological analogy, though he does

focus on the promise given to Jacob and how it is realized in his life.[39]

---

[36]*Brecht*, I:89.

[37]This is the description given by Uuras Saarnivaara in *Luther Discovers the Gospel* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1953), where he describes Luther's understanding of justification at different points in his career. From his first lectures on the Psalms (1513-1515), Saarnivaara observes that "in these lectures Luther understands justification to be a gradual healing from the corruption of sin by the power of grace. . . . [it] is typically Augustinian. It means a gradual 'becoming righteous' by the work of divine grace; not that a sinner is 'imputed or accounted righteous' for the sake of Christ" (66-67). As he is lecturing on Romans (1515-1516), this same view of justification may be observed from certain passages "which Paul definitely and clearly speaks of the imputed righteousness and not of being made righteous. Yet Luther--following Augustine--interprets them to mean the gradual process of becoming righteous" (82). The same is still true in the following years: "The year 1517 belongs to that period of Luther's life when he still understood justification as a renewal and a gradual cleansing from sin and not as the imputation of the righteousness of Christ" (89); "The Luther of the Heidelberg disputations [April, 1518] knows as yet only the 'second' part of the work of God, the renewal by the 'gift of grace', and forgiveness as its supplement. In the spring of 1518 Luther's conception of justification still is of the Augustinian type" (91). It was later in that same year, observes Saarnivaara, that Luther finally began to break free of his Augustinian view of justification as a sanitive, transformational process: "The fall or early winter of 1518 had brought him to a new phase in his development, to the possession of the Reformation insight into justification. The Augustinian period of his pilgrimage was past. Justification, in its primary meaning, was no longer a process of becoming righteous. Rather it was the immediate appropriation of the righteousness of Christ" (101).

[38]On this subject, see *Brecht*, I:128-136; Saarnivaara also observes (*Luther Discovers*, 89) that this was true of Luther's first published book on the Seven Penitential Psalms in 1517: "The theme of the book is: Grace belongs to the humble."

[39]He summarizes Jacob's thoughts in this chapter as follows: se electum ex sola misericordia (*WA*. 9:414 lines 26-27). "He [Jacob] was elected by mercy alone." And later he paraphrases the text [Jacob, addressing God]: tu qui locutus es 'quia benefaciam tibi, et ponam semen tuum sicut harenam

Sermons on Genesis 1523

By 1523 Luther's interpretation of Old Testament narratives had taken on a different accent. Brecht notes that in this year Luther began preaching on Genesis in the Sunday afternoon services. Luther's reason for doing this was to exhibit the unity of the Old and New Testaments and "to have the examples of the patriarchs replace the legends of the saints."[40] In the case of Genesis 32, Luther highlights the example of the patriarch's faith as a gift that is given and preserved by God. "A main point of this chapter is how the faith of the holy patriarchs very nearly was lost, and he [God] yet again grasped him, as we shall soon hear."[41]

Luther also makes several comparisons of Jacob with the Apostle Peter, who, like the patriarchs, realized both his own weakness and also the strong hand of God to save when he was unable to walk to Jesus on the water.[42] This, Luther says, is the "best point of this chapter. When faith becomes weak and one begins to doubt, there is no other counsel or recourse than to the one who let us doubt, as also St. Peter

---

sea,' see to it, O Lord, that you are mindful of this promise, save the seed by which you are going to bless the earth."

[40]*Brecht*, II:284 (cf. 58), where he cites the Latin preface to the collection of sermons, *WA*, 24:1-3. Brecht notes that, although Luther began his course of sermons on Genesis in 1523, they were not published until 1527--a German version by Stephan Roth (*WA*, 24; *St. L.*, 3) and a Latin version by Caspar Cruciger, et al. (*WA*, 14).

[41]*St. L.*, 3:507 §5: Das ist ein Hauptstück dieses Capitels, wie der Glaube dem heiligen Patriarchen schier gar entfällt, und er ihn doch wieder ergreift, wie hören werden.

[42]As the negative example against which Jacob is compared, Peter is first noted in the introduction to the chapter (*St. L.*, 3:506 §3; cf. 508 §9): "On the other hand, if one thinks that he should be the strongest, he [God] makes him so weak that he trembles in horror even before a tree-leaf; as Christ did with Peter (Matt. 14:29-30). When he got out of the boat and wanted to come to him on the water, he was bold and confident, and feared no one, but as soon as he saw a wind coming he began to hesitate in fear and sink."

(Matt. 14:30) on the water cried out as he was sinking, 'O Lord, help me!'"[43] Thus, Luther the narrative exegete saw value in proclaiming the examples of the patriarchs' faith: how God alone blessed and strengthened it.

Yet for Luther the use of narratives as examples does not diminish their Christological value. God's promises to His people remain central in Luther's interpretation and proclamation of narratives. His exposition of the narrative in this sermon often follows the pattern: explanation of the story, Christological value, application to the lives of the hearers. Frequently, though, he dwells at length on the actions and decisions of the patriarch, suggesting possible motivations or rationales. Only rarely does Luther offer explanations of the Hebrew text in this sermon (one prominent exception naturally being the name "Israel"). In this fashion, then, he moves from one point in the action of the narrative to the next, pointing first (and at times only) to the text, then to Christ or to the gracious promises of God, and then to the hearer.

An example of this pattern of exposition will clarify Luther's approach. In treating Genesis 32:34b ("Then a man wrestled with him until daybreak"), Luther first notes that one cannot explain how the struggle began. "But as to how the struggle came to pass, we will not arrive at with words. . . . Yet we cannot know what it really was."[44] He then compares Jacob's struggle to that of the children of Israel in the Exodus when they were at the Red Sea, pondering their impending deaths in the face

---

[43]*St. L.*, 3:508 §9.

[44]*St. L.*, 3:511 §15. "Wie aber der Kampf sei zugegangen, werden wir nicht mit Worten erreichen. . . . Doch können wir nicht wissen, was es gewesen sei."

of Pharaoh's approaching armies. They had cried out to God for help, only to see things get far worse. Yet God delivered them, fulfilling His promise.

Luther then draws the comparison with Christ, who in the making of His kingdom suffered peril and the torture of certain, painful death. Jesus also cried out in agony on the cross, only eventually to suffer death itself. Yet God delivered Him according to the promise, raising Christ from the dead.

Luther then turns to his parishioners. "When we cry out to him to deliver from death, he first leads us in [toward death]. Such things he does now so that the reason he frustrated [us], which we did not believe, we now will know the how, where and when; for this, faith has a place, and allows God to make it."[45] Luther saw that narratives as examples highlighted how God's gracious gift of forgiveness was won, while they also showed the believer's struggle to lead a faithful life; Luther employed narratives for the purposes of both justification and sanctification.

Elsewhere the example of Jacob is upheld as a model for the Christian in his dealings with God. As Luther concludes his treatment of Genesis 32:24-28, he exhorts his hearers to defeat God in like manner as Jacob did by seizing and holding fast to the Word of God's goodness. "For this reason he has us learn that such is written to instruct us, if also such a man meet us, that it is necessary for us in this way to hold

---

[45]*St. L.*, 3:511-512 §16. A prior discussion of how God's answer to prayers for help shows how surprising His answer might be. Luther comments with an almost vicious sarcasm on God at first giving just the opposite of what was requested by Jacob in the face of meeting brother Esau: "Jacob is timid and despairing before his brother, so God came and strengthened him, and made him still more sick. This would be quite a comfort (*ein guter Trost*) for me if I worked in the mud and He puts me in completely. God frightens him and makes him fearful, but he raises his voice to cry out and pray; then He comes and wants to strangle (*will erwürgen*) him" (*St. L.*, 3:511 §14).

God so that we also would be Israel."[46]

Luther concludes his analysis of this chapter by noting its exemplary value for

the Christian: "So we have this excellent chapter, in which you see the wonderful

counsel [Rath] which God wants for his saints, for us a comfort and to be an example,

so that we have such things in our daily remembrance, whether he acts [spielen] in

this way also with us, in order that to this end we might be called [daß wir gerüftet

daZu wären]."[47] Thus, narratives serve as examples to show the Christian how to act

in time of trial and testing, as well as to demonstrate the faithfulness of God to His

promises.

Lectures on Genesis 1542

The 1542 work of Luther on Genesis 32 is a product of the older, mature

theologian and exhibits more of a lecture quality, though its theological value is no

less than that of his sermons; Luther is never not preaching![48] However, in contrast to

his earlier writings on Genesis 32, strict adherence to the particular text under

consideration is not a hallmark of these lectures; rather, he freely moves from verse to

verse, passage to passage, testament to testament, so as to facilitate clear proclamation

---

[46]St. L., 3:516 §29.

[47]St. L., 3:519 §34.

[48]Skevington Wood observes: "Our accepted modern distinction between preaching and biblical exposition was unrecognized by Luther. His preaching was always expository in nature and his exegetical lectures invariably contained a homiletical element not nowadays associated, for good or ill, with scholarly comment. As Heikinnen makes clear, Luther's exegesis was essentially kerygmatic. ['Luther's Lectures on the Romans,' Interpretation. 7:180] This realization that biblical theology and biblical proclamation are inter-related was part of Luther's reappraisal of the Word" (A. S. Wood, Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation [London: Tyndale Press, 1960], 10).

of the whole counsel of God. A further distinction of these lectures from his earlier

works is that he regularly supplies technical notes on the Hebrew text as well as

concordance studies of important vocables or idioms.[49] In this way Luther is ever

applying the analogy of faith, letting Scripture interpret Scripture and applying the

results to his listeners.

The use of Hebrew narratives as examples also gains in prominence with

Luther in this work,[50] thus raising an important theological question: For what

purpose does he apply the words and deeds of Jacob as examples? Are the patriarchs

held up as "great heroes of the faith," those who have overcome in adversity, ones

whom we are to imitate? And if so, then for what reason are we to imitate them? If

it were indeed the case that Luther simply pointed to the good deeds of the patriarchs

as models for which all should strive, then a charge of confusing Law and Gospel

could well be raised against Luther. Indeed, such would seem to be the case in

several of his "examples."

> The chief significance of this story, then, is the example of perfect saints
> [*exemplum perfectorum sanctorum*] and of temptations in high degree, not against
> flesh, blood, the devil, and a good angel but against God appearing in hostile
> form. For although Jacob does not know who this man is, he nevertheless feels
> that he has been forsaken by God or that God is opposed to him and angry with
> him.[51]

---

[49]For example, see *LW*, 6:106 on "camps" in Genesis 32:8; *LW*, 6:119 on "gift" in Genesis 32:14; *LW*, 6:136 "to struggle" in Genesis 32:24; *LW*, 6:137 on *kap* in Genesis 32:25; *LW*, 6:141-142 on "Israel" in Genesis 32:27-28.

[50]No less than 13 times throughout his analysis of this chapter does Luther extol its value as an "example"; e.g., see *LW*, 6:101, 102, 103, 104, 117, 123, 134, 139, 146, 147, 148-49, 152.

[51]*LW*, 6:134; *WA*, 44:99 line 39, commenting on Genesis 32:34b.

If this were the regular way in which Luther held up the examples of the patriarchs, then the charge of legalism might well stick. Certainly, without even a mention of Christ or the Gospel of God's gracious gift of forgiveness offered through faith, narratives become little more than opportunities for crass moralism. If no external help or deliverance is offered, then all that remains is to rely on oneself. However, such is not the case with Luther. A more common "example" that he upholds is this:

> Jacob, therefore, has supplied the church of God with a very useful and beautiful example of faith struggling in infirmity, so that we should not think, as the monks imagined, that the fathers and prophets were senseless rocks and logs in whom there was no infirmity. . . . Let us then contemplate the holy patriarchs and comfort ourselves with their examples since, indeed, they were not always firm and strong in faith.[52]

Luther's use of narrative-as-example here points to the self-insufficiency of the patriarchs; they could not and did not live their lives of promise on their own, without external help. They relied on the gracious care and protection given them by the promisor. This is the Law/Gospel use of narrative examples which Luther proclaims to his hearers.

A typical treatment of a narrative by Luther in this work includes a simple explanation of the actions or events depicted in the verse, especially when something is potentially unclear. Such explanation will regularly include references to the relevant context of the verse, as well as to any other parallel or similar occurrences in Scripture. Illustrations from history or folklore will often be given to clarify the point

---

[52]*LW*, 6:148-149, commenting on Genesis 32:31-32.

of the verse. Technical comments on the Hebrew text will also be given, especially where there are difficulties or other specific points to be made from the Hebrew usage. Finally, application to the hearers is almost always made, whether from the main point of the verse or from some other observation elicited by the text.

Luther's exposition of Genesis 32:25 illustrates his regular treatment of narrative.[53] He begins by explaining how Jacob was able to wrestle with God and be competitive at all. He then recounts a fable that illustrates the strength of a faithful man in temptation. Next, Luther explains the Hebrew word *kap* ("hollow, socket") and its significance for the referent of the phrase "hollow of his thigh." He then concludes by describing what sort of wrestling trick this might have been by retelling the account of a young Jew who was a famous wrestler and who also employed these sorts of moves.

Luther later summarizes the value of this chapter:

> So far, then, we have had the example of the holy patriarch which in a wonderful manner comforts the saints who are weak in faith. But just as they accepted the consolation and as the temptation redounded to their salvation, so also we should make efforts to become like them in the struggle and in the rescue. For then we shall learn what that means which is mentioned in Ps. 34:8: 'O taste and see that the Lord is good!'[54]

What matters most for Luther is the Gospel: God comforts saints who are at the same time sinners ("saints who are weak in faith"). As Bryan Spinks has said, "For Luther the key which unlocks Scripture--therefore all theology--is the doctrine of

---

[53]Genesis 32:25: "When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob's thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him." Commentary is from *LW*, 6:136-38.

[54]*LW*, 6:152.

justification."[55] The literal sense was important for Luther in how it proclaimed the

Gospel. Hidden or deeper spiritual meanings are not sought to replace the plain sense

of the words of the narrative. The earlier fourfold sense has long been abandoned by

Luther in favor of a simpler and clearer understanding of Scripture.[56] What had once

been an imposing structure often forced on unsuspecting texts had been replaced by an

approach to Hebrew narratives which understood them as divinely-inspired literature

given by God to communicate His Words of Law and Gospel. In his remarks on

Genesis 3:23-24 he concludes that "in the interpretation of Holy Scripture the main

task must be to derive from it some sure and plain meaning."[57] In so doing he was

working his way toward a "historical-Christological interpretation which was to be the

core and center not only of his teaching but also of his preaching and living."[58]

Preface to the Old Testament 1523

Two other writings of Luther are relevant to an analysis of his interpretation of

Hebrew narratives. In his 1523 "Preface to the Old Testament," Luther supplies a

---

[55]Bryan Spinks, *Luther's Liturgical Criteria and His Reform of the Canon of the Mass*(Grove Liturgical Studies 30 [Bramcote, England: Grove Books, 1982]), 18. Spinks goes on to say (20): "While at first sight the importance Luther attached to justification may seem out of all proportion, it is more understandable when it is realized that for Luther 'justification', 'the word', 'Jesus Christ', and 'the gospel', are bound together inseparably, and are almost interchangeable terms. . . . For Luther, Scripture must be interpreted Christocentrically, which means gospel-centered interpretation, understood in terms of the gospel of justification by faith alone."

[56]Saarnivaara observes (*Luther Discovers*, 89): "During 1517 he [Luther] rejected the Augustinian-Catholic theory of the fourfold sense of Scripture (*Quadriga*) and began to interpret the Scriptures according to their literal meaning."

[57]*LW*, 1:231.

[58]Hilton J. Oswald, *LW*, 25:xi (translator's preface to Luther's *Lectures on Romans*).

simple introduction to the Pentateuch. It was written so that "those who are not more familiar with the Old Testament may have instruction and guidance for reading it with profit."[59] He first notes that the Old Testament is primarily a book of laws which teach what men are to do and not to do, but it also has "certain promises and words of grace, by which the holy fathers and prophets under the law were kept, like us, in the faith of Christ."[60]

With regard to the few comments he makes concerning Genesis, it is clear that Luther valued the concrete way in which God's wrath and deliverance were lived out in the lives of His people. "Genesis is made up almost entirely of illustrations of faith and unbelief, and of the fruits that faith and unbelief bear. It is an exceedingly evangelical book."[61] Thus, to those unfamiliar with the Old Testament, Luther would have them read the narratives of Genesis for the sake of the examples of faith and unfaith, in other words, to be shown how God's Words of Law and Gospel were either received or rejected.

How Christians Should Regard Moses 1525

Luther's "How Christians Should Regard Moses" was actually one in a series of sermons on Exodus, preached August 27, 1525.[62] In this difficult and, at times seemingly contradictory writing, Luther addresses the question of the relationship

---

[59]*LW*, 35:236.

[60]*LW*, 35:237.

[61]Ibid.

[62]*LW*, 35:157-174; cf. supra n. 35.

between God's contradictory Words of Law and of Gospel, and the related question of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Though he does not specifically address the issue of <u>narrative</u> interpretation, his comments are helpful in understanding how Law and Gospel are proclaimed through the Pentateuch.

Luther writes that the only two public sermons delivered by God were from Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19-20) and at Pentecost (Acts 2), the former issuing the doctrine of the Law, the latter the doctrine of the Gospel. The Law teaches what we are to do, the Gospel teaches what has been given us.[63] However, the Law of Moses binds only the Jews and not the Gentiles. "We will regard Moses as a teacher, but we will not regard him as our lawgiver--unless he agrees with both the New Testament and the natural law. Therefore it is clear enough that Moses is the lawgiver of the Jews and not of the Gentiles."[64] So then the question is posed: "Why then do you preach about Moses if he does not pertain to us?"

Luther answers saying that there are three things to be noted as valuable in Moses: the Law, the Gospel, and the examples of faith. As Law, Moses adds something which nature lacks, and thereby supplies a fine example from which excerpts may be taken for our use, but not out of compulsion. In the sense that the Law was <u>beyond</u> the natural law written in the heart, Moses was a *Sachsenspiegel* ("Saxon Code of Law") for the Jews, that is, a set of ordinances governing secular as well as sacred life. Such rules for the church-state Israel no longer applied. Neither

---

[63]*LW*, 35:162.

[64]*LW*, 35:165.

did those ceremonial regulations which supplied the order for Israel's divine service.
Only that is binding which is written in the heart. "Now this is the first thing that I
ought to see in Moses, namely, the commandments to which I am not bound except
insofar as they are [implanted in everyone] by nature [and written in everyone's
heart]."[65]

As Gospel, Moses supplies something more which nature lacks: the promises
and pledges of God about Christ. Herein Luther rejoices in many Old Testament texts
which proclaim the Gospel as being external to him. He also notes that it is not
enough simply to say, "Since this is God's Word, we must do it." Rather, "we must
look and see to whom it has been spoken, whether it fits us. That makes all the
difference between night and day. . . . You must keep your eye on the work that
applies to you, that is spoken to you."[66] The Gospel of Christ is Moses' word for
you.[67]

> Summing up this second part, we read Moses for the sake of the promises about
> Christ, who belongs not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles; for through
> Christ all the Gentiles should have the blessing, as was promised to Abraham
> [Gen. 12:3].[68]

In a brief one-paragraph section Luther treats the third thing to be noted in

---

[65]*LW*, 35:158. Since this writing appears in several places and in different recensions, textual
variants are a certainty. The bracketed phrases in this text are reprinted as they appear in the American
Edition, where it is noted that they are from the version given in the 1528 *Exposition of the Ten
Commandments*. *WA*. 16:380, 11:26-31.

[66]*LW*, 35:170.

[67]*LW*, 35:171. Here Luther also notes, ". . . [some say] 'God's Word, God's Word.' But my
dear fellow, the question is whether it is for you (*ob er dir da ist*)."

[68]*LW*, 35:173.

Moses: "the beautiful examples of faith, of love, and of the cross, as shown in the fathers, Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and all the rest. From them we should learn to trust in God and love him."[69] He goes on to note the examples of the godless and how they were punished for their unbelief. Luther gives short shrift to the issue of narratives as examples for people to imitate, perhaps out of fear of abuse in the form of moralism. He does not wish to stress narratives' value as examples only of the believer's struggle in the life of faith, but rather treasures them as examples of God's Words of Law and Gospel. Narratives serve as concrete examples of justification and sanctification.

Luther sums up his view of the value of the Torah:

> The Old Testament is properly understood when we retain from the prophets the beautiful texts about Christ, when we take note of and thoroughly grasp the fine examples, and when we use the laws as we please to our advantage.[70]

The Law has been fulfilled for you and abolished through Christ, yet it remains and agrees with one's conscience in accusing of sin and showing the need for a Savior. Nevertheless, one receives from Christ the Gospel of forgiveness for sins. This is the main thing to note in Moses. In addition, the examples of the patriarchs show how God's Law and Gospel were received and rejected.

Conclusions: Luther and Narrative Proclamation

Luther's exegesis and proclamation of Old Testament narratives may be summarized briefly in terms of: his formal and material principles; narratives' value

---

[69]*LW*, 35:173.

[70]*LW*, 35:174.

as examples of Law and Gospel; narratives' value as examples of faith and life;

narratives as God's Words of Law and Gospel incarnate; Christological typology of

narratives; and their value homiletically in the Divine Service.

Luther confessed clear formal and material principles for narrative

interpretation. The narrative text is assumed to be divinely inspired. It is also seen to

be historical, that is, its words, sentences, and paragraphs refer to events or words

which at one time actually did occur. This is identical with the literal meaning of the

text.[71] However, the fact that the narrative refers to an actual historical event is by no

means the only thing for Luther. This same literal meaning also has a Christological

significance, in that the events or words to which it refers do, in themselves, point to

and proclaim the coming Messiah. What matters most for Luther in interpreting Old

Testament narratives is the Gospel of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection for the

forgiveness of sins, given to the reader through the means of God's Word.

Luther valued Hebrew narratives as examples of Law and Gospel. The literal

meaning of a narrative is Christological also in that the narrative events described are

a record of how God dealt with His people in either a Law way or a Gospel way. The

Patriarchs and the people around them, for example, were either blessed as a result of

the grace of God, or they were indicted in their sinful ways and condemned as a result

of their own actions. In this way narratives also serve as concrete examples of God's

covenant with Abram (Genesis 12:1-3) and how God actually does "bless those who

---

[71]This is also the evaluation of Luther and other pre-critical interpreters given by Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 1974), 23-24.

bless you [Abram], and the one who curses you I will curse." God dealt with His

people via either Law or Gospel, both of which reach their clearest expression at

Calvary in Christ's suffering under the full burden of the Law while at the same time

being motivated solely by mercy and lovingkindness. Thus the Christological

significance of the Patriarchs as examples, both positive and negative, is important

also for the faithful today.

In addition to their value as examples of Law and Gospel, Luther valued

narratives for their examples of the believer's faith and life. It is clear that the Gospel

would be lost if all that one saw and proclaimed from narratives were the examples,

the "Great Heroes of the Faith." Luther deliberately minimized this point in his 1525

"How Christians Should Regard Moses," and for the most part clearly explained its

usage in his later writings. However, such proclamation of "great heroes" might well

be identified in the earlier works of Luther, wherein justification is understood more in

the Augustinian way of Christological analogy. The focus is firmly fixed on Christ,

but it is still not the clearly-understood Gospel of the later Luther, since He (Christ) is

upheld as the one towards whom we should draw near (or be drawn near). The sinner

is referenced not outward, to a redeeming gift freely given, but rather inward, to a

work of humiliation yet to be performed. It is only when we realize our lowly,

humble state that we are truly blessed.[72] Proclamation such as this would burden the

hearer with the unbearable yoke of the Law, shifting the responsibility for attaining

forgiveness and eternal life over to the listener. Indeed, Luther does uphold the

---

[72]See especially Brecht's discussion of early Luther's "theology of humility," *Brecht* I:128-136.

characters depicted in these stories as models of the believer's faith and life (as does

the New Testament: 1 Corinthians 10:1-11; Hebrews 11). However, as examples of

both faith and unbelief, narratives show how God's *externum verbum* was either

received with thanksgiving or rejected in unbelief.

Herein lies the unique, incarnational benefit which Luther saw for preaching

from narratives: The Gospel is not described or theorized, but rather it is shown

concretely, apart from abstraction. In this way, it could be said of Luther's view that

narratives are God's Words of Law and Gospel incarnate, in that they recount how

God has in word and deed acted for the benefit of His people. And since this God is

confessed to be the same God who sent His Son to die on the cross, and who gives

out the forgiveness there won through the words, water, bread and wine of His means

of grace today, it is of benefit to know how He once acted and now continues to act,

ever in the way of Law and Gospel.

This incarnational aspect of the Gospel is demonstrated most clearly in the

specific case of Genesis 32. Jacob knew that he had received the promise of God.

But now God Himself was testing Jacob, coming to him in the flesh to see if he would

forsake the promise that he had received. Yet it was not a sure thing that Jacob was

going to cling to God's promise; God's actions were contingent on Jacob's response to

the test. As Luther commented on the place of Jacob, "God could have produced a

seed and promoted a blessing even with Jacob destroyed."[73] Yet the narrative recounts

that Jacob did cling to the promises of God's Word, and that he was blessed as a result

---

[73]*Lectures on Genesis*, 1542, *LW*, 6:116.

of it. This is a clear statement of the Gospel according to Genesis 32.

Luther also confessed a Christological typology of Hebrew narratives. Jaroslav

Pelikan notes that Luther's understanding of historical typology allowed him to see the

forgiveness and deliverance given out to the Old Testament saints as that which was

ultimately achieved by Christ on the cross. The Old Testament focal point of the

Gospel was the Exodus; the New Testament showed its fulfillment in Christ. Pelikan

comments, "To it [the Exodus] all the preceding narratives pointed; from it all the

subsequent narratives and declarations of the Word of God derived their meaning."[74]

And this redemption was an anticipation of the ultimate redemptive deed in Christ.

Pelikan summarizes:

> When God spoke His redemptive Word to Israel, the redemption which this Word
> wrought and brought was the redemption ultimately accomplished in Christ. By
> this profound insight Luther was able to go beyond the "Messianic prophecies" of
> the Old Testament to a recognition of the Word of God in the Old Testament even
> in those passages where the Messiah was not mentioned.[75]

Finally, Luther saw the homiletical value of narratives for the Divine•Service.

He preached on these narrative texts because they were the appointed (*lectio continua*)

Scripture readings. For Luther, the sermon was the main part of the liturgy. As such,

it is God's Word, the living word of the Gospel proclaimed to the faithful. Yet the

sermon (and, for that matter the liturgy) is not merely a collection of words aimed at a

group of awaiting ears. Since it is *Verbum Dei*, this living voice of the Gospel is

active and does what it says. This is the way not of mere words, but of living and

---

[74]Jaroslav Pelikan, *Luther the Expositor: Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings.*
(*Luther's Works: Companion Vloume.* American Edition [St. Louis: Concordia, 1959]), 58.

[75]Ibid., 59.

active words. Indeed, for Luther the basic form of the Word of God was always the

oral Word of proclamation.[76] As the liturgy with its words invokes, confesses,

absolves, forgives and blesses, so also do the words of the sermon on a narrative text

indict, condemn, forgive and bless. This is Luther's understanding of the divine *viva*

vox evangelii: the words do what they say, and this not because of anything in the

words themselves, but rather because they are the gracious words of the Lord.

As with the liturgy, so also with a sermon on an Old Testament narrative.

God's Words of Law and Gospel are seen most clearly as they are incarnate in the

Divine Service of the liturgy, and in the concrete realization and depiction of the

biblical story. No abstraction or theoreticals here--the Gospel is sure and certain as it

is given through the pastor in the words and deeds of the liturgy, and in the words and

deeds depicted in Hebrew narratives.

Post-Reformation Developments

Hans Frei describes Luther's hermeneutical view of narratives as "pre-critical,"

noting that for Luther the literal meaning of the text was identified as being nearly

identical with the actual events to which it referred. In other words, Luther saw the

biblical world depicted by the narratives as being extremely similar to the real

historical world.[77] The narrative of Jacob wrestling at the Jabbok was understood as

---

[76]As Pelikan convincingly argues (Ibid., 64): "God had so constructed man that the Gospel and the Law could reach him most effectively through the medium of the living voice. Christ Himself did not write anything; but He spoke and preached continually, to make it clear that the basic form of the Word of God was always the oral Word of proclamation. Because of this emphasis on the oral Word, Luther also assigned great importance to the ministry of the Word of God."

[77]H. Frei, *Eclipse*, 4.

referring to just such an actual historical occurrence. However, since most higher-critical interpretation of narratives tended to separate these two "worlds," thus denying the historically referential function to a narrative such as Genesis 32, Luther is labeled "pre-critical."

Frei continues by observing that typology was not originally adverse to literal interpretation. In fact, the two were seen as complementary by Luther and others. When the biblical world and the actual historical world are equated, then a figural or typological understanding is a natural extension of the literal meaning. In other words, the unity of the Bible's story of God's deliverance together with man's own record of history is manifested in typological fulfillment as witnessed in Scripture. With this understanding, salvation history is given a concrete reference in human history and is seen as the working out of God's plan for the redemption and deliverance of all people.

This view of salvation history is clear throughout Scripture and especially in Luther's typological view of the Exodus event as the central act of deliverance in the Old Testament, which itself pointed to Christ's work of redemption on the cross. Since biblical narratives actually refer to events occurring in different periods of the same sequence in time, it follows that interpreters would seek to understand narratives' relation to the bigger story. This was not a matter of superficially comparing and noting similar historical events; it was a view of narratives as part of salvation history. This unity was based in the literal sense of Scripture and expressed via typology and other figural interpretation.

Protestant Orthodoxy and Pietism

This description of narratives is true also of those who followed in Luther's footsteps in the post-Reformation age, although in different expressions, in the movements known as Orthodoxy and Pietism. Hans Frei notes that scholars of the Protestant Orthodoxy movement such as Quenstadt, Hollaz, and Calov, as well as those of the Pietistic camp such as Bengel and Rambach, understood and employed the analogy of faith in narrative exegesis, letting the clearer passages of Scripture interpret those that were less clear. They also confessed the literal sense of the narrative text to be equivalent to its accurate historical reference.[78] On these points the two camps were in agreement.

The differences between Orthodoxy and Pietism with regard to narrative interpretation are also easily summarized. The Orthodox scholars were concerned with the accuracy of the literal sense, so much so, in fact, that a stark literalism characterized their exegesis.[79] They were interested in determining the exact manner by which texts were inspired, even to the point of deciding whether or not the Hebrew vowel points and accents were divinely inspired. It is clear that they had departed in principle from Luther's central concern in exegesis for the Gospel. Their primacy of dogmatic formulations led to a dry formalism--labeled "dead orthodoxy" by some-- which in turn fueled the rise of several reactionary trends, one being the Pietistic movement.

---

[78]H. Frei, *Eclipse*, 37-41.

[79]Ibid., 37.

While confessing the same understanding and importance of the literal sense of Scripture, the Pietists went further. They mandated a "living orthodoxy" of sorts by means of their stress on direct illumination by the Holy Spirit and the resultant discernment of the spiritual sense of Scripture.[80] The literal, historically-referential sense remained important, but alone it was seen as an insufficient means of interpretation. Their counter-proposal went to the opposite extreme, however, in suggesting a further special revelation of the Spirit not necessarily connected to the words of Scripture. Thus the Pietists severed themselves from the dogmatic, rigid connection with the grammatical sense common to the Protestant Orthodox movement. However, their resulting view of Scripture was correctly diagnosed by some as being a partial return to the pre-Reformation primacy of the multiple senses of the *Quadriga*.[81]

The Enlightenment and Age of Reason

Another result of Protestant Orthodoxy's subjection of scriptural interpretation to rigid dogmatic constraints (and at the same time a result of the excesses of the Pietists) came in the form of the neological and rationalist scholars of the eighteenth century. Beginning perhaps with Spinoza and Cocceius in the late seventeenth century,[82] the eighteenth century witnessed the modernistic breakdown of the unity of the biblical story world with the actual historical world. The world as narrated by the Bible was no longer seen to be necessarily similar to the real world of that time. Any

---

[80]Ibid., 38-39.

[81]Ibid., 39.

[82]Ibid., 42-50.

correlations between the two had to be proven by means of documented evidence.

The Bible was to be treated just like any other literary artifact.

This disintegration also led to a breakdown between the figural and realistic interpretations. Luther's view of typology as a natural extension of the literal sense of Scripture had been abandoned. With a presupposition that narratives were not necessarily historically accurate, the rationalistic higher critics were left with a baseless typological interpretation to salvage any value from the Old Testament apart from that which was provable by science. The figural interpretation now stood on its own apart from its former firm grounding in the literal, realistic sense. As Frei notes,

> Figural reading underwent a transition as the logical relation between literal or grammatical and historical reading changed. It became a historical argument of doubtful value, instead of an extension of the literal sense.[83]

Narratives were valuable as history only when they were demonstrably so.[84]

Narratives were seen to be valuable as important records of the experiences of the faithful. Frei notes this as being the view of Cocceius, a forerunner of the *heilsgeschichtliche Schule* ("Salvation History School").[85] This movement would later view salvation history as the meaning of the Bible's narratives, though in a very important sense different from that of Luther and his followers. The historicity of Hebrew narratives was seen as being of secondary importance; narratives simply

---

[83]Ibid., 40.

[84]Ibid., 28.

[85]Ibid., 50.

pointed to the more important overarching theme of the Bible: salvation history.[86]

Though unreliable historically, Hebrew narratives testified of a more important

revelation. In this case, the guiding theme was the history of the great saving acts of

God as they were believed by the people to have happened.

Contemporary Approaches

From these views it seems that Frei's observation is indeed accurate:

> The confusion of history-likeness (literal meaning) and history (ostensive
> reference), and the hermeneutical reduction of the former to an aspect of the latter,
> meant that one lacked the distinctive category and the appropriate interpretive
> procedure for understanding what one had actually recognized: the high
> significance of the literal, narrative shape of the stories for their meaning. And
> so, one might add, it has by and large remained ever since.[87]

Published in 1974, this epitaph is no longer completely accurate. The chasm between

literal meaning and accurate historical reference would seem to have narrowed.

However, along with the recent narrowing of this gap has come a close examination

and redefinition of the actual process of communication itself. What exactly is the

communicative function of the author of a text? . . . of the text itself? . . . of the

reader of a text? In which of these is the meaning of a narrative to be found? Or is a

reevaluation of these roles valuable at all (or even allowable) for those interested in a

Lutheran hermeneutic for Hebrew narratives? A brief survey of the contemporary

---

[86]In summing up the Genesis 32 pericope, Gerhard von Rad concludes: "The Yahwist presents in it theologically a witness of great complexity. . . . It contains experiences of faith that extend from the most ancient period down to the time of the narrator; there is charged to it something of the result of the entire divine history into which Israel was drawn. . . . Israel has here presented its entire history with God almost prophetically as such a struggle until the breaking of the day" (*Genesius.* J. H. Marks and J. Bowden, trans. [London: SCM Press, 1972], 325).

[87]H. Frei, *Eclipse*, 12.

methods and their answers to these questions will conclude this section in preparation for Chapter Four.

New Criticism

The movement known as "New Criticism" has been influential[88] for many of the so-called literary approaches common today.[89] It began with a concern for pure objectivity in interpretation, a trait that was lacking in both the historical-critical and the traditional historical-grammatical schools of interpretation.[90] Whereas these methods focused on the author and the background of the narrative text for meaning, New Criticism concentrated on the text itself. Its main tenet was the self-sufficiency of the literary work. This implied, for them, the relative unimportance of the author's intentions and background.[91]

New Criticism's exclusion of the author's role and intentions from the textual interpretation process was codified in what is known as the "Intentional Fallacy." This

---

[88]M. Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1985), 7. Though the movement known as "New Criticism" has for the most part died out, Sternberg notes the "invaluable service to the study of literature" rendered by the movement's emphasis on close analysis of the language of the text.

[89]Some names usually associated with this method are Meir Weiss, David Gunn, Adele Berlin and others of the so-called "Sheffield School" (T. Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 27). James Barton (*Reading*, 140-157) has suggested that Brevard Childs' "Canonical Approach" is related to New Criticism, though Childs himself denies any association with or justification for his interpretation on literary grounds (B. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], 74).

[90]This is the judgment of M. Sternberg, *Poetics*, 7; and T. Keegan, *Interpreting the Bible: A Popular Introduction to Hermeneutics* (New York, NY and Mahweh, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 76; Keegan also suggests other possible reasons for New Criticism's development, including university politics and the push for academic research funding.

[91]T. Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 26.

view claims that

> Whether the author has expressly stated what his intention was in writing a poem, or whether it is merely inferred from what we know about his life and opinions, his intention is irrelevant to the literary critic, because meaning and value reside within the text of the finished, free-standing, and public work of literature itself.[92]

The author has no control over the meaning of a text apart from what it must mean on its own as a literary work.

This approach is appealing in the case of Hebrew narratives, where the author's comments are rarely supplied in the text itself or from other extra-textual sources. It is also a helpful corrective to the Historical-Critical emphasis on the "author(s)" and the *Sitz im Leben* to the exclusion of serious consideration of the text. The dangers in excluding the author from consideration will be treated in the next chapter under the section of Thesis IV, "Authorial Intent," where it will be argued that the author's intention as communicated through or objectified by the text is an important control on the reader of narratives.

Structuralism

Structuralism is a movement similar in some ways to New Criticism, but has been more influential of late in the 1970s and 80s. A simple definition or assessment of it, though, is not easily given, primarily because it is such a broad, all-encompassing term. It usually covers methods that can trace their lineage back to the

---

[92]Ibid., 20. This view was originally proposed by W. K. Wimsatt and M. Beardsley in their 1946 article "The Intentional Fallacy," reprinted in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1954), 3-18; cf. J. Barton, *Reading*, 147-151, and M. Sternberg, *Poetics*, 8, who caution against misinterpreting them or overexaggerating Wimsatt and Beardsley's claims.

linguistics of Ferdinand de Saussure (b. 1857) and the social anthropology of Claude Levi-Strauss (b. 1908). Because it is such a broad term, it is not unusual to find contradictory claims made by structuralism's various practitioners.

One definition of the movement as it relates specifically to linguistics is offered by Anthony Thiselton: "Structuralism concerns the operation of signs within a structured system, how these signs reciprocally condition one another, and how an underlying 'code' . . . determines the range of possibilities within which the signs operate."[93] As one might surmise from this assessment, a structuralist approach is interested almost exclusively in the final form of the text itself, apart from concerns with the author, his intentions, or the history of the text. What matters most is the inter-relationship of words (Thiselton's "signs") in a given text. Thus structuralism's focus is synchronic and not diachronic (as was common in historical-critical methodologies) in that it considers the use of language apart from any specific time, and not its development through time. A corollary of this view is its denial of the role of history and author in the interpretation of a text (as mentioned above).

In seeming contradiction to an emphasis on the words and their use in the text, however, the appeal is made to the existence of a deeper structure, or, as Thiselton noted, an "underlying code," which controls the use of language. Meaning is sought not in the text itself, but in the code that underlies the text. Thus the "structure" of structuralism usually refers not to the organization of the text itself (its sentences, linguistic patterns, etc.), but rather to a "trans-textual" reality. A clear understanding

---

[93]Anthony C. Thiselton, "Keeping Up with Recent Studies: II. Structuralism and Biblical Studies: Method or Ideology?" *The Expository Times* 89 (1978):329.

of this reality is not easily explained, much less the practical benefits of this highly-technical and jargon-filled discipline. Good summaries of this influential movement are offered by Anthony Thiselton[94] and Tremper Longman,[95] who critiques the structuralist approach: "Its high level of complexity, its almost esoteric terminology, and its (thus far) very limited help toward understanding the text (which for most structuralists is not even a concern) have and likely will prevent the vast majority of biblical scholars from actively participating in the endeavor."[96]

Reader-Response Criticism

Perhaps as a reaction to the strong emphasis on the text itself by methods such as New Criticism and Structuralism, some recent interpreters have shifted the focus of interpretation to the <u>reader</u> of the text. As Meir Sternberg has noted, "No matter how the writing is viewed, its reading remains the pivotal activity of biblical study as a whole, for a scholar is only as good as his interpretation."[97] This is certainly true of the interpreter of a Hebrew narrative, and such a focus on the reader is helpful in pointing out the role presuppositions play in the determination of a text's meaning.

Problems with a focus on the reader ensue, however, when the importance of the reader is elevated above that accorded the text itself. This is especially clear in

---

[94]A. Thiselton. "Keeping Up," where he critiques structuralism in general from a conservative evangelical viewpoint, and discusses its current practice specifically in New Testament studies.

[95]T. Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 27-37.

[96]Ibid., 37.

[97]M. Sternberg, *Poetics*, 17.

the case of recent radical ideological readers such as liberation theologians or feminist scholars,[98] whose presuppositions in the form of definite, political agendas distort the meaning and application derived from a narrative for the purpose of supporting their own ideas. Some of these interpreters appeal to reader-response theory as a way of justifying their approaches. The difficulty with them, however, lies in the perceived relationship of the roles of text and reader. Is the reader a servant or a master of the text? In these cases it is clear that the reader is dominant; however, a reexamination of this relationship is needed.

It is a truism that there are no "presuppositionless readers." But it is a true servant of the Word who recognizes and confesses his own presuppositions and seeks to follow the leading of the text. This sense of sola scriptura is clearly different from the "text alone" understanding of the New Criticism and structuralism, both of which deny the role of the reader and, even more so, of the author. Thus the next chapter will begin with a confession of presuppositions for the interpreter of narratives, along with a study of how the Bible itself lays claim to certain characteristics for its readers.

---

[98]T. Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 39.

CHAPTER FOUR

HERMENEUTICS FOR NARRATIVE PROCLAMATION

In a discussion of the theology of the history of the patriarchs, Gerhard von

Rad supplies a clear explanation of the difficulty associated with the interpretation of

biblical narratives.

> All who read the stories of the patriarchs with an eye to their theology will
> soon see that it is not easy to give an answer to the question so self-evident to us,
> what is their meaning, their theological content? How are we to approach this
> question? For in these stories we are not confronted with an account of the
> history which furnishes the reader with explicit theological judgments, or which
> constantly allows him to participate in extensive theological reflexion [sic] upon
> the history, as the Deuteronomistic account does. In the stories of the patriarchs
> the reader will look in vain for any formulation of the narrator's own theological
> judgment.[1]

Several of von Rad's presuppositions may be noted: the meaning of Hebrew narratives

is closely connected with, if not identical to, their theological content, and the

narrator's own theological judgment is important for determining this content.

However, since the narratives themselves do not explain how they are to be

interpreted, some other control must be sought. The goal of this chapter, then, is to

identify presuppositions of interpretation and propose a method for such interpretation

--a hermeneutic--for Hebrew narrative.

With the recent decline of higher-critical scholarship's influence, the

---

[1]Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*. Volume I: *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), 165.

possibilities for establishing a hermeneutic for proclamation of these narratives (and of

the Old Testament in general) have been seen in a new light. Perhaps John Bright

may be credited for starting this trend in 1967 with his *The Authority of the Old

Testament.* Bright dealt not with the question of <u>how</u> but rather <u>why</u> to interpret and

preach the Old Testament. He supplied a more conservative response to the

predominantly higher-critical views of the Old Testament which dealt with the

fundamental issues of the relation of the two testaments and the authority of the Old

Testament for Christian proclamation.

Another person who served as a catalyst in renewing interest particularly in

Hebrew <u>narrative</u> interpretation was Robert Alter. Like Bright, Alter wrote against the

backdrop of higher-criticism's neglect of the text, emphasizing the value of biblical

narratives as literature in his landmark publication *The Art of Biblical Narrative* in

1981. As a secular literary scholar who was also knowledgeable in biblical Hebrew,

Alter heralded the value of "text-immanent" exegesis in his application of formalist

literary criteria to biblical narratives.[2] "Text-immanent exegesis" looks for the

meaning of biblical texts in the texts themselves as they are met in the Bible instead

of trying to get back behind the finished form of the text to earlier stages (*a la* source,

form, and redaction criticism). The many who followed in this prolific trend of text-

immanent studies have upheld numerous and divergent presuppositions and views of

---

[2]A formalist literary analysis seeks to uncover a text's meaning via a study of a text's
components, e.g., its themes, motifs, messages, plot, characterization, setting.

how to interpret the Old Testament.[3]

The aim of this chapter, however, is not to examine in detail the recent history of the various methods of biblical (or even Old Testament) study. Such a task has been ably handled by others,[4] and as such is beyond the scope of this work. The goal, rather, is to answer the need for clearly stated and scripturally-mandated presuppositions for understanding the meaning of narratives. Several answers have already been supplied in the previous chapter, some with more clearly-acknowledged presuppositions than others. This is a matter of hermeneutics and is the fundamental issue for all textual interpretation and proclamation.

The first presuppositions considered will be the interpreter's understanding of narratives as Scripture. Though fundamental to all pericopes, the issue of formal and material principles is no less importrant for Hebrew narratives. Flowing from a clear understanding of narratives as Scripture is an understanding of prose narrative as history. Luther's views on the purpose of narratives will be important here, especially his emphases on narratives as examples of God's actions of Law and Gospel as well as examples of God's people struggling to live faithful lives.

---

[3]A helpful guide to the recent trends in "text-immanent" studies is provided Paul R. House's compendium *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism* (Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 2; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992) [hereafter referred to as "*BFC*"]. House credits Alter's *Art of Biblical Narrative* for the current wide-spread popularity of text-immanent studies of the Bible (ibid., 15-16).

[4]E.g., James Barton, *Reading the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984); Terrence Keegan, *Interpreting the Bible: A Popular Guide to Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985); Tremper Longman, III, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation*, Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987); or James W. Voelz, "Biblical Hermeneutics: Where Are We Now? Where Are We Going?" In *Light for Our World: Essays Commemorating the 150th Anniversary of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri*, ed. John Klotz (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Seminary, 1989), 235-57.

Once these presuppositions have been confessed and defended, the reader is ready to attend to the narratives as literature, considering the author's artful use of literary devices such as metaphor, plot and charaterization. Also important will be the question of <u>authorial intent</u> (What did the author intend when writing a narrative? Is this intention discernible and does that have any bearing on meaning now?) and the issue of <u>referentiality</u> (How do narratives record and refer to historical events? What connection is there between this historical reference and a narrative's meaning?). The Christian pastor must have clear answers to these questions of *meaning* if he would preach a sermon that is based on his narrative pericope.

It is obvious that different *meanings* of a narrative can be found by different readers. This may simply be the result of a difference in hermeneutical presuppositions. It may also come from a difference in the understanding of *meaning* or a variation in other presuppositions antecedent to interpretation. These issues will be resolved through the explanation and defense of four theses, all of which come from issues already raised in connection with the task of Christian interpretation and proclamation of Hebrew narrative. Each thesis will be considered in conjunction with (or in contrast to) several current methods of narrative interpretation that were presented at the close of Chapter Three. A further aid to clearer understanding of the specific points of each thesis and of the diverse interpretive methods listed above will be supplied through concrete illustration by means of the sample Hebrew narrative discussed in Chapter Two, Genesis 32:22-30.

Narrative as Scripture

The first thesis asserts Hebrew narratives' divine inspiration and their central

focus as the Gospel. It further asserts that this view of the Bible is the result of faith

in the Gospel; such a faith is not a result of a particular view of Scripture.[5] This main

Gospel message of Hebrew narratives is recognized and affirmed only by the reader

who has the Spiritual gift of faith.

> I. Narrative as Scripture As divinely-inspired documents whose primary author
> is the Holy Spirit (formal principle), a clear understanding and affirmation of
> Hebrew narratives is granted by the same Spirit through faith, which confesses
> their central message (material principle) as the Gospel of God's gracious
> forgiveness for Christ's sake given through faith.

As a hermeneutical thesis, this is a fundamental presupposition for all interpretation

and proclamation. As such, it could perhaps remain as an unstated assumption.

However, to overlook the formal and material principles would open the possibility of

forfeiting the Bible's value as Holy Scripture by treating it as just another specimen of

ancient Near Eastern literature. To confess this thesis, on the other hand, is to

recognize the unique nature of Scripture as distinct from all other literature, and to

retain the certainty of God's Word of Gospel as communicated through Old Testament

narrative. Only faith, given by the Spirit of God, recognizes and confesses Scripture

to be God's Word.[6]

---

[5] This point is made and given extensive treatment in the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations report "Gospel and Scripture: The Interrelationship of the Material and Formal Principles in Lutheran Theology" (St. Louis, MO, 1972), 14, and shown in contrast to the Historical-Critical method's presuppositions in the 1973 report "A Comparative Study of Varying Contemporary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation."

[6] This point is defended clearly and convincingly by Ralph Bohlmann in his *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions*, Revised Edition (St. Louis: Concordia, 1983). See especially his concluding summary of principles for biblical interpretation, pp. 144-145.

The use of the word "confess" in this context is deliberate in that this thesis is not to be <u>proven</u> logically or scientifically, but rather it is <u>acclaimed</u> by faith. Though Scripture passages can be and have been identified which would support the assertions of its formal and material principle,[7] such proof-texts do not <u>prove</u> what they say. Rather, they join in confessing the same thing, namely, God's Word as Law and Gospel, which is understood only by grace through the eyes and ears of faith.[8] As Luther noted, Hebrew narratives serve as examples of Law and Gospel. What faith sees and hears in these passages is a clear message of divine grace working in and through the history of God's people. (The purpose of narrative as it serves Scripture's central message of Gospel is taken up in the second thesis.)

The Historical-Grammatical method serves this type of interpretation and proclamation of the Word of Gospel by virtue of its emphasis on careful study of the canonical text of Scripture in light of its historical origin.[9] The interpreter attempts to serve the text by clarifying its message, all the while maintaining for himself a ministerial role in relation to the text. Such a posture for the interpreter is consonant

---

[7]Such passages would include 2 Timothy 3:14-17; 2 Peter 1:19-21; Luke 24:25-27; Acts 10:42-43; 20:27; 1 Peter 1:10-12; Romans 15:4; Hebrews 1:1-2; John 20:30-31; Matthew 10:20. The same confession is made by the Lutheran symbols, which, while not including a specific article on Scripture *per se*, are nonetheless permeated with an understanding of Scripture as God's saving Words of Law and Gospel (see the Nicene Creed: "The Holy Spirit . . . who spoke by the prophets"; Ap IV,107; AC XXVIII,49; FC SD VII,50; X,15; and Bohlmann's *Principles of Biblical Interpretation, passim*).

[8]It should be noted that through faith worked by the Holy Spirit the reader is cordially disposed to the text, thus allowing him/her to benefit in faith from the Word's messages of Law and Gospel. The "clear understanding" granted by the Spirit does <u>not</u> include special insight into the meaning of texts, better historical knowledge, or ability in biblical languages. If that were so, then all Christians would be excellent interpreters of Scripture. Rather, a reader with the Spiritual gift of faith also has the gift of "congeniality" or "utter openness" to the text. (James Voelz, unpublished class notes from E-800, "Problems in Hermeneutics," Fall, 1991)

[9]R. Bohlmann, *Principles*, 128.

with the view of Scripture in Thesis I. The student who employs the Historical-Grammatical method seeks to determine the literal, intended sense of the Word of God. (The specific subject of authorial intention will be treated in the fourth thesis.)

Those who utilize this method of biblical interpretation will assert the divine origin and inspiration of Scripture, and its authority as the source, or formal principle, from which all Christian teaching is expounded. Not all Historical-Grammatical method practitioners subscribe to the same material principle, however. Some proponents of this method place a high value on the recovery of the original author's intentions via a strict, literal interpretation of the text. Others focus on the text in light of the Gospel, given by the grace of God through faith, as the heart and center (i.e., the material principle) of scriptural interpretation. While this distinction may not be obvious at first, a closer look at these two viewpoints will clarify the issue at stake. For the sake of convenience, these two methods will be labeled, respectively, "Evangelical"[10] and "Christological." While these two approaches are certainly quite similar in terms of hermeneutical presuppositions, their differences will be highlighted with respect to the first thesis. This contrast will center on the material principle of Scripture.[11]

The Evangelical historical-grammatical method of interpretation runs counter to this thesis because of its different material principle. Characteristic of this movement

---

[10]Though the use of "Evangelical" may at times be more broad in scope, the intended referent here is the specific Evangelical Movement, commonly referred to as "Evangelicalism."

[11]The further implications of this distinction for the understanding of the role of the author and authorial intent will be presented under Thesis IV below, p. 103.

is its especially high view of Scripture--so high, in fact, that God as the sovereign ruler of history is seen as the center, or material principle, of theological interpretation, in contrast to the Christological understanding of the Gospel as the center of Scripture and guide for its clear exposition.[12] Indeed, since Evangelicalism's material principle is not necessarily referenced to Christ but rather only to God's powerful and inscrutable deeds, it would seem to have limited value in guiding a narrative interpreter, since he is interested in studying the narratives' recounting of God's powerful deeds, not simply acknowledging that they occurred.

This would seem to be the case with Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., who rebuts other Evangelicals who would employ a separate material principle as an *analogia fidei* in exegetical pursuits.[13] He correctly observes that an *analogia* or *regula fidei* is a corollary to "Scripture interprets Scripture." However, he stresses that "Theology must be objectively derived from the text; it is not to be subjectively imposed on the text by the interpreter"[14] from other, later sections of Scripture. His point is well taken; the narrative should be allowed to "speak for itself" so as to observe its unique emphases. A material principle should not overshadow a text to the extent that the text's own particularity is lost for the sake of the material principle. However, Kaiser himself

---

[12]This is, in essence, the conclusion of Terry Forke ("The Doctrine of Scripture in Fundamentalist Theology: A Lutheran Appraisal," S.T.M. thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1989, 145-46), who credits Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism for their adherence to Scripture as the sole source and norm of doctrine, but points to their lack of the primacy of the Gospel in Scripture interpretation as their point of departure from Lutheran biblical understanding.

[13]Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), 134-40.

[14]Ibid., 137.

clearly explains the useful and important role of an *analogia fidei*. Such a role would be as a biblical "theology that 'informs' each Biblical text,"[15] though Kaiser limits this "informing theology" to those passages which were chronologically prior to the text under study. According to Kaiser, later (e.g., New Testament) passages and theology are relevant only <u>after</u> the exegetical task is complete.[16] Perhaps Kaiser's intention in stressing this point so strongly is to have the interpreter focus on what, for example, Moses' hearers knew and understood when they heard the pentateuchal narratives read. As such, this is a helpful reminder to the exegete (even if its goal of understanding what the original hearers understood is not always achievable with certainty). However, Kaiser's oft-repeated caveat of using only (chronologically-)antecedent Scripture seems curiously out of place, especially considering his own high view of Scripture as being able to interpret itself. Such a view is overly restrictive, considering God the Holy Spirit's primary role in the inspiration of <u>all</u> Scripture (a point Kaiser would certainly affirm).

In contrast to the Evangelical approach, the Christological historical-grammatical hermeneutic as taught by Luther <u>is</u> in accord with Thesis I and the identification of Hebrew narratives as Scripture. It is similar to the Evangelical approach in its identification of Scripture as God's Word, mediated through inspired writers and spokesmen. However, the primary emphasis here is not on the Bible as God's Word (though faith also confesses this); the accent is on Christ and (especially

---

[15]Ibid., 136.

[16]Ibid., 140.

in the case of Hebrew narratives) the Gospel of His perfect fulfillment as the promised

Messiah of the old Covenant. Faith confesses this focus of all Scripture as God's

gracious plan of salvation, centered in Jesus Christ and His atoning death for sins.

With such a focus (*contra* Evangelicalism's less-specific material principle of God as

sovereign Lord of history), the events recounted in Old Testament narratives are seen

in light of their historical preparation for and fulfillment in Christ, not merely for their

own literary or historical sake (though these aspects are certainly also important).

Indeed, this understanding of the material principle of Scripture is confessed by the

Apostles John and Paul, who explain the purpose of God's Word: "These are the

Scriptures which testify about Me [Jesus]" (John 5:39); "[These Scriptures] are able to

make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 3:15).

Referring to the Hebrew Scriptures, these New Testament passages proclaim and

confess the Gospel focus of all Scripture, including the accounts recorded as Hebrew

narrative.

Thus the Christological method of historical-grammatical interpretation

emphasizes both the literal, historical meaning of the text and the fact that it is a part

of Scripture's clear, overall message of the Gospel of God's gracious deliverence and

forgiveness for Christ's sake. Only when both the formal and material principles are

confessed will the understanding of Hebrew narratives be according to Scripture's own

self-proclaimed method of Gospel-centered interpretation.

Purpose of Narrative

A clear understanding of Scripture's formal and material principles (Thesis I) is

essential to all biblical interpretation. Yet it remains to be shown how <u>Hebrew</u>

<u>narratives</u> serve the central message of Scripture. How do narratives relate to the

Gospel? The answer to this question is necessary for the Christian pastor's

proclamation of these texts, and is the substance of the second thesis.

> II. <u>Purpose of Narrative</u> Such an understanding of Hebrew narratives highlights
> their purpose in selectively reporting History so as to show by example what God
> did through Israel and the Patriarchs to accomplish His saving purposes, and so to
> instruct the faithful in God's ways of dealing with man through Law and Gospel.

Here one's understanding of *Heilsgeschichte* is of central importance for the

interpreter. Is Scripture's historical record accurate? Are the narratives to be trusted

apart from external verification? Can an overarching plan of salvation history be

detected in the events recounted in Hebrew narratives? While this thesis asserts a

positive answer to these questions, traditional Historical-critical interpreters have said

just the opposite, positing a hermeneutic of doubt regarding the reliability especially of

Hebrew narratives. First the three important aspects of this thesis--narrative

selectivity, theological nature of history, didactic function--will be discussed, followed

by a comparison with the presuppositions of the historical-critical method.

Selectively Reported

The first assertion of this thesis is that the history reported by Hebrew

narratives is not <u>comprehensive</u>, but rather is <u>selective</u>. Only those events and actions

were included which served the overall purpose of the writing. It is clear that certain

events were not included in narrative accounts; consider the many concluding

summaries of the lives and reigns of the kings of Israel and Judah, most of which are

similar to the summary given for King Solomon (1 Kings 11:41): "As for the other events of Solomon's reign—all he did and the wisdom he displayed—are they not written in the annals of Solomon?" This illustrates the point that other documents and records were kept for various purposes, some of which were to keep detailed accounts of the court history.[17] These histories, however, though certainly consulted by the biblical writers, were not retained as canonical Scriptures. Only what was important for the purpose of the Old Testament narrative was included in the Bible.

Also implicit in the use of the term "History" is a value-judgment of the accuracy of those events selected for inclusion in the Hebrew narratives. What is recorded actually occurred as recounted. While a full-blown defense of the historicity of narratives is beyond the scope of this paper, several sub-points must be stressed here.

Just as the assertions of Thesis I concerning scriptural narratives' formal and material principles were confessed by faith, so also is the historical accuracy of these narratives first confessed by the same faith. God's Word itself claims to be true in what it recounts, and faith believes its claim. This faith also rejoices in the external confirmation accorded the biblical record by scientific proofs and archaeological discoveries; however, when such methods show otherwise than a ringing endorsement

---

[17]Other non-canonical books referred to in Scripture include the Book of the Wars of Yahweh (Numbers 21:14) and the Book of Jashar (Joshua 10:13; 2 Samuel 1:18), both of which seem to have been collections of songs of war in praise of God, as well as the Book of the Annals of Solomon (1 Kings 11:41), the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel (e.g., 1 Kings 14:19), and the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah (e.g., 1 Kings 14:29). Numerous other books are cited by the Chronicler; cf. also John 20:30-31, regarding the selectivity of the Gospel writers and their purpose in writing: "These are written that ye may believe. . . ."

of the scriptural data, faith is not shaken or disproved, but rather understands the limitations of mankind's understanding and reason to be responsible for the seeming contradiction. The fault for alleged inconsistencies in a narrative's historical references is not with God, but with man.

The other sub-point to be made from the use of the term "History" is that the confession of Scripture's material principle as the Gospel does not in any way diminish the value of narratives' historicity. To be rejected is the so-called "Gospel-Reductionist" position which would consider Scripture valuable only insofar as it proclaims the Gospel. With such a view, other considerations such as historical accuracy are secondary to the concern for the Gospel. However, the primacy of the Gospel message in no way necessitates the conclusion that the medium of narrative did not intend to present historical facts. It is important to maintain both the Gospel as material principle of Scripture's narratives, and also the importance of narrative's historical accuracy and specificity. This conclusion is persuasively stated in the LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations report "Gospel and Scripture," and also serves to shift the focus to the purpose of narratives as Scripture, the second main assertion of this thesis.

> Lutherans say that the Gospel of forgiveness for Christ's sake through faith is the key that opens the Bible because this Gospel is, after all, the heart and center of the Bible's message. But this must not be understood to mean that as long as this central message is not lost or distorted it is immaterial how the student of Scripture regards and interprets the literature which is the medium of the message. The purpose of the Scriptures is to make us wise unto salvation. At the same time Scripture also intends to give us information about other matters. (2 Tim.

3:15-17)[18]

Theological Nature of History

Unquestionably, the mere assertion of accurate historical reference is

insufficient as a statement of Hebrew narratives' purpose. Thus the second main point

of this thesis maintains that narratives "show what God did through Israel and the

Patriarchs to accomplish His saving purposes." Though faith rightly confesses the

historical accuracy of what was selected for inclusion in the narrative, it is rather the

reasons for this selection that are of prime importance. This determination of the

selection criterion is correlative to the determination of authorial intent, since it was a

divinely-inspired author who chose and presented the specific events. As discussed in

the previous section, this intent is the proclamation of the Gospel, which Gospel alone

creates faith. Narratives are arranged so to illustrate this gracious action of God for

and through His people throughout history. Robert Alter acknowledges this

understanding:

> The implicit theology of the Hebrew Bible dictates a complex moral and
> psychological realism in biblical narrative because God's purposes are always
> entrammeled in history, dependent on the acts of individual men and women for
> their continuing realization.[19]

Though Alter does not go on to detail "God's purposes," he is accurate in pointing to

---

[18]LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations, "Gospel and Scripture," 12.

[19]Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 12. Alter later notes on the same topic (19): "Rather than viewing the literary character of the bible as one of several 'purposes' or 'tendencies' . . . I would prefer to insist on a complete interfusion of literary art with theological, moral, or historiosophical vision, the fullest perception of the latter dependent on the fullest grasp of the former."

the importance of historical events for what God wants to accomplish. To acknowledge the historicity of the Bible is one thing; it is wholly different that a man listen to God's Word and believe through the gift of faith. Historical accuracy may at times be verifiable; faith in the God who has accomplished these historical acts for His redemptive purposes is beyond the realm of proof. As St. James later writes (James 2:19): "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder."[20] It is God's purpose in inspiring the writing of Old Testament narratives that faith be created and strengthened through narratives' particular method of proclaiming the Gospel, and not just an acknowledgment of historical facts recounted.

John Bright offers a clear explanation of how this proclamation of the Gospel is effected by Hebrew narratives:

> The patriarchal narratives . . . form a part of a great theological history that comprises the whole of the Hexateuch, and that seeks not merely to record the facts of Israel's origins as these were remembered in sacred tradition, but also to illustrate through them the redemptive acts of God in behalf of his people. This is surely no demerit! It is this, indeed, which imparts to the narrative eternal relevance as the word of God. The mere facts of Israel's history, were it not also a history of faith, would interest us but little. Yet it means that event and theological interpretation must not be confused. The historian, being but a man, cannot write history from the side of God. Though he may indeed believe that Israel's history was divinely guided as the Bible says (and he may say so!), it is human events that he must record. These he must seek as best he can behind documents that interpret them theologically.[21]

---

[20]Melanchthon gives clear expression to this point (i.e., that faith is not equivalent to knowledge) in the Apology to the Augsburg Confession (IV,49, emphasis added): "It is not enough to believe that Christ was born, suffered, and was raised unless we add this article, *the purpose of history, the forgiveness of sins;* the rest must be integrated with this article, namely, that for Christ's sake and not because of our own merits the forgiveness of sins is bestowed upon us" (citations from the Lutheran Confessions are taken from *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, T. Tappert, trans. and ed. [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959]).

[21]John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), 67-68.

Bright later adds that the "history of redemption" is the "Bible's central theme in both testaments."[22] This is the sense of *Heilsgeschichte* which is crucial to the interpretation of Hebrew narratives--a comprehensive understanding of the whole of scriptural revelation as it highlights the grace of God working in and through His chosen people for their deliverance, culminating in the person of Jesus Christ as the ultimate deliverer of all mankind. Each narrative in some way depicts the working of God for the deliverance of His people, yet at the same time is also a part of the divine plan of redemption which came to fruition in Christ. These individual acts were not merely a series of random *Heilsgeschehen,* or "salvation occurrences," but rather were part of a deliberate plan.[23] They were not incidental happenings which were fulfilled in themselves, but rather pointed to the coming and work of the Messiah.

The case of the Jacob narratives, and especially of Genesis 32, clearly demonstrates this theological idea of history as divine plan of redemption. It is true that the meaning of several details of the text's literal sense is not clear to the reader (e.g., Jacob's reason for re-crossing the Jabbok alone, the significance of the answers he received to his questions). Perhaps the resulting aura of mystery which surrounds the incident was deliberate on the part of the author/narrator. But the reason for this text's inclusion in the scriptural record is clear when considered in light of a *heilsgeschichtliche* view of narrative's purpose.

Jacob, as a patriarchal progenitor of the coming Messiah, was himself a

---

[22]Ibid., 87.

[23]Cf. R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 300.

walking example of how God was guiding and directing His plan of redemption.

Luther also saw the value of this narrative as an example of God's working for the

deliverance and blessing of His people.[24] Here perhaps more than anywhere else God

directly intervened in the affairs of man even to the point of wrestling with him so as

to set the stage for the coming of His people Israel, personified in the man Jacob.

Clearly, the incident has tremendous significance in its own historical particularity: it

shows God's grace in delivering Jacob from his fear of meeting brother Esau the next

day; it also records the divine granting of the name "Israel" and Jacob's own blessing

by God Himself. This narrative has further significance in its relation to God's

preparation for the coming Messiah--since it was from Jacob's line that the promises to

him and his forefathers would be fulfilled and through them that the Christ would be

born. It is the Gospel that this divine providence and deliverance is proclaimed and,

through this proclamation, that faith is created. Once this faith is received, the final

aspect of narrative purpose becomes relevant.

Didactic Function

The third aspect of this thesis is the didactic function of Hebrew narrative.

This function is "to instruct the faithful in God's ways of dealing with man through

Law and Gospel." Scripture itself instructs the reader in how this use is to be applied.

St. Paul notes a didactic purpose for Scripture in general in Romans 15:4: "For

whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through

---

[24]See Chapter Three, pages 42-42, 48, and 51 for Luther's use of Hebrew narratives as examples of God's Law and Gospel actions, as well as examples of the struggle of the sanctified life.

perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." He refers

specifically to the lives and events of the patriarchs as examples (τύποι: 1 Corinthians

10:6) for us, "that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved." Paul

continues (1 Corinthians 10:11): "Now these things happened to them as an example

(τυπικῶς), and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages

have come." The writer to the Hebrews also exalts the patriarchs as great examples[25]

to revere because of their faith: "Now faith is the asssurance of things hoped for, the

conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval" (Hebrews

11:1-2). Not only are the historical events identified by the Apostle as being valuable

for our instruction, the events themselves occurred as part of God's revelation in

history, as "divinely designed, prescriptive prefigurations."[26] The Lutheran

Confessions also note that "The history of the people of Israel is a type of what was to

happen in the church of the future."[27]

R. K. Harrison suggests a further basis for this didactic function: "The didactic

nature of most Old Testament historical narratives . . . resulted largely from the

general Hebrew attitude that events were essentially *sub specie aeternitatis*."[28] In other

words, narratives were not written merely for the sake of historical record. There was

---

[25]Luther pointed to these passages when highlighting the value of narratives as examples of the justification of the sinner and his new life in faith. (The references are listed in the footnote above, n. 24.)

[26]This is the insightful conclusion of Richard M. Davidson in *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical τύπος Structures*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981), 296.

[27]Apology IV.395, *The Book of Concord*, T. Tappert. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1959), 167.

[28]R. K. Harrison, *Introduction*, 299.

also a "transcendental spiritual factor"[29] of Israel's history which meant that, since it

recounted the actions of the unchanging God, historical narrative was (and is) valuable

also for the instruction of the faithful who were to follow.

The subject matter of this instruction was the manner(s) in which God

interacted with man. Since narratives recounted "the outworking of the Covenant

provisions towards a planned goal,"[30] they were of value for learning how God dealt

with His chosen Covenant people both favorably and unfavorably. As Luther

regularly noted, narratives recorded divine actions of both Law and Gospel. Again

Robert Alter displays a clear perception of the biblical text in discussing this very

point:

> The ancient Hebrew writers . . . seek through the process of narrative realization
> to reveal the enactment of God's purposes in historical events. This enactment,
> however, is continuously complicated by a perception of two, approximately
> parallel, dialectical tensions. One is a tension between the divine plan and the
> disorderly character of actual historical events, or, to translate this opposition into
> specifically biblical terms, between the divine promise and its ostensible failure to
> be fulfilled; the other is a tension between God's will, His providential guidance,
> and human freedom, the refractory nature of man.[31]

This shows how Hebrew narratives also serve as "living word of God" in action

"judging the inner thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Here one can

see the practical results of the proclamations and promises of God to Adam, Noah,

Abraham and Moses. The regulations and blessings received and passed on by these

men were lived out in the accounts preserved as Hebrew narratives, which narratives

---

[29]Ibid., 300.

[30]Ibid.

[31]R. Alter, Art of Biblical Narrative, 33.

serve us as examples of how God deals with His people in the ways of Law and Gospel.

Thus narratives selectively record the judging and saving acts of God for the purpose of instructing the faithful in His ways of cursing and blessing, Law and Gospel. These teachings are valuable today as a result of their being a part of salvation history, a history which culminated in Christ, but which is still in progress through and for the faithful today.

Such an interpretation of Hebrew narratives as this would not likely be a result of the Historical-critical method. Several points of divergence with this thesis may briefly be noted. In contrast to the reverence for the author and the text common to the method suggested by this thesis, the so-called "Historical-Critical" school of interpretation was characterized by an attempt to move behind the text (and behind the author) to the *Sitz im Leben des Volkes.*[32] The purpose of narrative in this case was to serve as a window to the life and times of the author(s). Thus its meaning was primarily its reference to the world of the text--the narrative "referred" to the historical reality as seen by the author. The meaning of a narrative was limited only to what the text implied about the author and his/her world. The historical accuracy of narrative was acknowledged only insofar as it was historically verifiable and scientifically determinable. At times this "meaning-as-window-on-the-world" would appear

---

[32]T. Longman, *Literary Approaches.* 21-25. See R. K. Harrison, *Introduction.* for an exhaustive summary and helpful analysis of the Historical-Critical school.

completely oblivious to the text itself.[33] Furthermore, this meaning was retrievable

only through diachronic[34] reconstruction of the original text via the various critical

methods (e.g., literary source criticism, form criticism, redaction criticism).[35] An

assumption in all of these methods is that the key to a text's meaning is to be found in

its original use and/or transmission, not in its final (distorted) form.[36] The focus of

investigation is either the author who composed one of the original literary fragments

(source criticism), with the societal forces that shaped the sterotypically-formed

materials (form criticism), or with those who edited or collected the oral and written

traditions (redaction criticism). There certainly is value and benefit to be gained from

such extensive historical study; however, such an approach is methodologically flawed

in that it sees the primary locus of meaning as lying outside of (and preliminary to)

the text itself. When scholars became dissatisfied with these higher critical methods

---

[33]Numerous examples could be given to show how the Genesis 32 incident was interpreted, illustrating the critical neglect of the significance (and even, at times, the plain literal sense) of the text in favor of its clues for understanding the author and beyond. (For a discussion of these different aspects of *meaning*, see Thesis IV below on "Meaning of Narrative.") Claus Westermann concludes that the original narrative (which he identifies as being only verses 23-26a, 27, 30, 31a, 32) is "a narrative, a local story, which explained the name Penuel (or Jabbok), but did not yet contain the name Jacob. . . . It bears distinct animistic traits and is not to be dissociated from the region, the ford, the river. The danger of the ford is personified in the spirit of the demon who does not want to let the traveler cross the river. . . ." (*Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*. trans. J. J. Scullion [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985], 514-15).

[34]A *diachronic* approach to literature examines a text's historical development "through time." This is seen in contrast to the contemporary emphases in many branches of literary and biblical interpretation on a *synchronic* approach. Such an approach focuses on one stage (usually the final stage) in a text's development, regardless of its prehistory. Cf. Structuralism's emphasis on synchronic methods at the end of Chapter Three, p. 61.

[35]For a thoroughgoing survey and analysis of these types of criticisms, see R. Harrison, *Introduction*. 3-82; for a more concise evaluation see Horace Hummel, *The Word Becoming Flesh* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1979), 19-31 ("A Brief Sketch of Higher Criticism"); for an even briefer summary, see T. Longman, *Literary Approaches*. 23.

[36]T. Longman, *Literary Approaches*. 23.

they began entertaining other interpretive possibilities, in the form of the text-immanent methods of New Criticism, Structuralism, and the new literary analyses.

In sum, the second thesis asserts that the purpose of Hebrew narrative is to proclaim the Gospel of the God who has acted to deliver His people, through which He creates faith, and to instruct believers in His ways of Law and Gospel. In so doing, biblical narratives accurately recount the history that was deemed necessary for inclusion in the account. This is denied by the historical-critical methods, which assert a hermeneutic of doubt, demand historical verifiability for truth claims, and see the purpose of narrative as being a referential window to the *Sitz im Leben* of the author. A reaction to this view may be seen in the next thesis, which stresses the value of narratives as literature written by competent authors.

Literary Value of Narratives

The first two theses have established the formal and material principles as they relate to Hebrew narratives, and the purpose of narratives in light of their historical function in Scripture. Both of these theses have treated narratives from the point of view of their divine author-ity. The third thesis views narratives and their human authors, specifically focusing on how the interpreter approaches the narrative as literature.

> III. Literary Value of Narrative As humanly-written documents worthy of no less a status than "good literature," Hebrew narratives require a close reading so as to determine the author's competent and historically conditioned use of literary devices (e.g., metaphor, parallelism, plot development, characterization) in retelling the actual events of salvation history.

While it is important to maintain the priority of the considerations outlined in

Theses I and II, it is also vital not to ignore the features of Hebrew narrative as good,

humanly-authored literature. As such, careful attention to Hebrew vocabulary,

grammar and syntax (like that supplied in Chapter Two) is a crucial prerequisite. If

the interpreter lacks the ability to use the original languages, then a thorough study of

several reliable English translations is helpful. In either case, close attention to the

literary features of a text requires first an investigation at the level of individual words

and sentences.

Study of these literary features requires an attentive reading of the text as a

work of literature. This involves recognition of its genre and scrutiny of its intricate

nuances. Robert Alter gives a helpful summary of the focus of this thesis:

> By serious analysis [of Hebrew narratives] I mean the manifold varieties of
> minutely discriminating attention to the artful use of language, to the shifting play
> of ideas, conventions, tone, imagery, narrative viewpoint, compositional units, and
> much else; the kind of disciplined attention, in other words, which through a
> whole spectrum of critical approaches has illuminated, for example, the poetry of
> Dante, the plays of Shakespeare, the novels of Tolstoy.[37]

Douglas Stuart also hints at this type of serious analysis which requires that "careful

attention to details and to the overall movement of a narrative and its context are

necessary if its full meaning is to be obtained. What is implicit can be every bit as

significant as what is explicit."[38] Such "careful attention" to the formalism of

narratives will only prove fruitful, though, if the *conventions* of biblical Hebrew

---

[37]Robert Alter, "A Literary Approach to the Bible," *Commentary*. December 1975, 70-71, cited by Regina Schwartz, ed., *The Book and the Text: The Bible and Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 2; cf. idem, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 12-13.

[38]Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 83.

narrative are known. This is where the (earlier noted) importance of knowing the

author and his time period is obvious. Since the communication which is Hebrew

narrative is literary in nature, it behooves the interpreter to be well-versed not only in

the original language and its syntax, but also in the subtle functions of language in use

at that time and their implications for narrative communication. Thus the first aspect

of this thesis deals with the literary competence of the reader.

A Competent Reader

It is axiomatic that one who would read a Hebrew narrative must have the

skills necessary to read. But what are those skills? The "competence of the reader" is

a helpful concept emphasized by structuralist interpreters of biblical narratives.[39] Since

original authors knew the language in which they were inspired to write, and since

they communicated meaning by way of the conventions governing language at that

time, one who reads an Old Testament narrative today must seek this literary

competence by attempting to understand how the original readers/hearers interpreted

the text.[40] Such competence includes both an understanding of the Hebrew language

and also a sensitivity for its conventions and usages. Chapter Two highlighted the

benefits of access to the original language in connection with the Genesis 32 pericope.

---

[39]Jean Calloud notes two distinct types of competence: "Linguistic competence (knowledge of a language) and semiotic competence (knowledge of the rules which govern the different mechanisms of meaning), both being skills which can be improved, make it possible to compose and to use texts." Jean Calloud, "A Few Comments on Structural Semiotics: Brief Review of a Method and Some Explanations of Procedures" *Semeia* 15 (1979):52; reprinted in *BFC* 119. On the notion of "literary competence" see also J. Barton, *Reading*, 11-16; T. Longman, *Literary Approaches*, 31-33.

[40]T. Longman, *Literary*, 84.

Luther also stressed the importance of this sensitivity to "languages and letters,"[41] without which the communication of the sacred writers would be lost.

In addition the competent reader should also be able to identify the type of literature under consideration, whether it be poetry, personal letter, prose narrative, and so forth. Barton connects the idea of literary competence primarily with "the ability to recognize genre."[42] Such an ability clearly is a prerequisite for any biblical interpreter.

It is clear from the discussion of the first thesis that the competent reader must have one other important characteristic: faith in God. While it is true that any unbeliever can read and, to a certain extent, understand Hebrew narratives, the Bible itself tells us that only through faith in Christ is a full understanding and acceptance of God's Word possible. St. Paul explains how this clear knowledge is received:

> For to this day, when they [the Israelites with hardened hearts] read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds; but when a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed.[43]

Without faith, a reader of biblical narratives lacks an important characteristic that the

---

[41]"I am persuaded that without knowledge of literature pure theology cannot at all endure, just as heretofore, when letters have declined and lain prostrate, theology too has wretchedly fallen and lain prostrate; . . . Certainly it is my desire that there shall be as many poets and rhetoricians as possible, because I see that by these studies, as by no other means, people are wonderfully fitted for the grasping of sacred truth and for handling it skillfully and happily" *Luther's Correspondence*. P. Smith and C. Jacobs, eds. (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Pub., 1918) 2:176-177; cited by David Clines in "Story and Poem: The Old Testament as Literature and as Scripture" *Interpretation* 34 (1980):115; reprinted in *BFC*, 25.

[42]J. Barton, *Reading*, 16.

[43]2 Corinthians 3:14-16.

Bible itself says is necessary for a clear, "unveiled" reading.[44]

While the structuralist theory underlying the notion of literary competence may not be acceptable in its totality,[45] the idea of a "competent reader" is a helpful one that can be redeemed for further use. Thus, a literarily competent reader is one who has faith and a clear understanding of the language and conventions of Hebrew narratives. This understanding is fundamental for interpretation and is gained only through regular reading of those narrative portions of the Old Testament, as well as careful study and comparison of their word and sentence usage. A further assertion of this thesis is that an original author was competent enough to employ these narrative conventions.

A Competent Author

Some of these conventions of Hebrew narratives have already been mentioned: metaphor, parallelism, plot development, characterization. It was asserted in the first thesis that narratives were written by human authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (formal principle). It is also clear that these authors were aware of and competent in the conventions of Hebrew literature. It is precisely this fact that has led to the publication of volumes such as Alter's *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Barton's *Reading the Old Testament*, and Sternberg's *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, all of which have gone to great lengths to elucidate the conventions of Hebrew prose narrative. Alter has observed:

---

[44]But see Thesis I and note 8 (page 69) for a qualification of the term "clear understanding" and what is and is not granted by the Holy Spirit to the reader through faith.

[45]For a discussion of Structuralism and its underlying theory, see the end of Chapter Three, p. 60.

Every culture, even every era in a particular culture, develops distinctive and sometimes intricate codes for telling its stories, involving everything from narrative point of view, procedures of description and characterization, the management of dialogue, to the ordering of time and the organization of plot.[46]

Since the original author wrote in a way that made use of many of these conventions, the task of the modern reader is to determine how the original audience could have read them.

How are these conventions analyzed and understood? There is no easy way to gain understanding of the "competent author" of Hebrew narratives. An understanding of the many different aspects of formalistic study of narratives comes only with patient study and observation. However, much assistance is available from the secondary literature.[47] To answer this question further an inductive approach will be used, showing a sample of some of the important implications of this type of study for Genesis 32.

One important aspect of formalistic study of narratives is the point of view taken by the narrator/author. Sternberg notes that three basic relationships constitute point of view: "between narrator and characters, narrator and reader, reader and characters."[48] The reader is taken along on the journey by the third-person narrator

---

[46]R. Alter, "A Response to Critics," *JSOT* 27 (1983):113-17.

[47]E.g., Robert Alter's *Art of Biblical Narrative* discusses the use of biblical type-scenes, dialogue, repetition, characterization and narration; Meir Sternberg's magisterial study *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* presents a lengthy study of narratives' art of persuasion, informational redundancy, gapping and ambiguity, characterization, point of view and perspectives. Other, more popular, introductions to the topic include Tremper Longman's *Literary Approaches*, 75-100 and Fee and Stuart's *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 73-86. See also John Holbert's *Preaching Old Testament: Proclamation & Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, 59-76.

[48]M. Sternberg, *Poetics*. 130.

who observes and details what is deemed (by the narrator/author) as important in Jacob's life. From a reading of the larger context, it is evident that this is a common stance for the narrator throughout the Jacob cycle of narratives: a detached, omniscient observer who only occasionally comments on the significance or meaning of the events as they occur, and even less frequently offers insight into the characters' thoughts and motivations. This reticence plays an important part in how the characters are presented.

The characterization supplied by the narrator/author is an intriguing element of this narrative. It is often noted that Jacob had been characterized as a deceiver and that his name itself meant "deceiver" or "cheater." (See Chapter Two, page 21, for further discussion of the use of names in this passage.) It is also clear that this provides the background for the ironic twist that would now occur as the man who had cheated and overcome men on several other occasions now was wrestling with a man he could not overcome, resulting in the changing of his name to "Israel." This would seem to be the central theme of the passage, as it is emphasized by alliteration (in the original Hebrew) that is difficult to miss: Jacob (ya ʿᵃqob) wrestling (y heʿābeq) at the river Jabbok (yabboq). J. P. Fokkelman observes:

> Tripping his fellow-man by the heel (ʿqb) has for Jacob come to its extreme consequence: a wrestling ('bq) with a "man" which to Jacob is the most shocking experience of his life, as appears from the fact that thereafter he proceeds through life a man changed of name, and thus of nature, and under that new name he becomes the patriarch of the "Israelites."[49]

Even more interesting is the characterization of the man with whom Jacob

---

[49] J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975), 210.

wrestles. He is introduced rather matter-of-factly in verse 25: "And so Jacob was left

alone, and a man wrestled with him until the rising of the dawn." Nothing unusual is

mentioned about this combatant; no name is even given. In fact, no clues at all are

given by the narrator as to this man's identity--only that he is a "man." The reader is

left in the dark as to who this wrestler is at least until the dialogue of verse 27

("Release me, for the dawn is rising").[50] And *the fact that* the reader is not told this

person's identity contributes to a sense of mystery surrounding this passage.[51] Indeed,

the "man" himself in verse 30 refuses to supply his name. Because of this, the reader

must (with Jacob) evaluate the "man" and identify him by what he says and does.[52]

The pace of narration can also be an important interpretive clue. Pace is

determined by noting how time passes during the reading, whether a few verses cover

many years (fast pace) or only a few moments (slower, more detailed pace). The

slower the pace, the more important a scene.

The pace of the Genesis 32 narration suggests that the main thing of the

pericope is the dialogue at the conclusion of the wrestling match. The reader is told

that at some point during the night the episode began with Jacob transferring his

relatives and possessions across the river (vss. 22-24). When he was left alone, the

---

[50]It should be noted at this point that some English translations obfuscate the narrator's intention to keep the *man*'s identity a secret by including subtitles above certain sections of the text. In the NIV, the title above verse 22 is "Jacob Wrestles With God." Is there any possibility for suspense over the identity of Jacob's opponent after reading that subtitle? Instead of allowing the reader to wonder about whom Jacob had met, the reader is reoriented so as to anticipate God's appearance on the scene as a wrestler! Thus the intended suspense is foiled.

[51]M. Sternberg, *Poetics*, 241.

[52]This is also the conclusion drawn by Fokkelman, *Narrative Art*, 213.

reader is told that a man wrestled with him until daybreak (vs. 25). The narration

moves quickly from the start of the wrestling (which lasts from vss. 25b-26) to the

dialogue at daybreak (vss. 27-30). At this point the pace slows dramatically, as the

reader is informed of the conversation between Jacob and the man. The comparatively

longer section for the dialogue together with its slower pace of narration suggests that

this, and not the wrestling match itself, is the main thing of the passage.[53]

Thus, the literary value of narratives can be a helpful guide to a competent

reader who is interested in textual interpretation. Or is literary criticism of Hebrew

narratives an end in itself? The conclusion of this paper is that close literary analysis

is a means to achieving the goal of understanding the meaning and theological

significance of the narrative. Adele Berlin argues, however, that "literary criticism of

the Bible is an end in itself. There is no need to make it yield a theological or

historical discovery."[54] She goes on to allow that such discoveries are also possible,

but that they are a different level of interpretation. Meir Sternberg takes a different

approach in posing questions concerning "the narrative as a functional structure, a

means to a communicative end, a transaction between the narrator and the audience on

whom he wishes to produce a certain effect by way of certain strategies."[55] Clearly he

would argue that biblical narratives are "ideological literature" designed specifically

---

[53]Further and more detailed literary observations of this sort are given by Fokkelman in *Narrative Art*. 208-223, which observations are stated in a way that is both clear and interesting to read.

[54]Adele Berlin, "Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David's Wives" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 23 (1982):69; reprinted in *BFC*, 220.

[55]Meir Sternberg, "The Bible's Art of Persuasion: Ideology, Rhetoric, and Poetics in Saul's Fall" *Hebrew Union College Annual* 54 (1983):45; reprinted in *BFC*, 234.

for the complex art of communication.[56] The disagreement between Berlin and

Sternberg as to the end or goal of Hebrew narratives is one that focuses on the issue

of meaning. Since the second thesis has already demonstrated the purposefulness of

Hebrew narratives (God's Word is a means to work the faith of the reader and to

strengthen and instruct in that faith), the question is left as to how this is

accomplished. The next thesis will further examine this central question of meaning

in the interpretation of Hebrew narratives.

Meaning of Narrative

By definition, a hermeneutical method of interpretation is one that seeks to

determine the meaning of a text. In the case of narratives, however, "meaning" can be

a difficult goal to achieve. Yet though the biblical narrative is to be studied as a

literary document (Thesis III), it is also a unique literary creation (Thesis I). It was

given for the sake of specific purposes (Thesis II), the achievement of which depends

on a correct interpretation of the text. If the Bible were any other, non-normative

genre, as Krister Stendahl observes, it would likely be an insult to ask the artist or

poet what he actually meant or intended. Stendahl observes: "The normative nature

of the Bible requires, however, a serious attention to original intentions of texts."[57]

The final thesis supplies this needed "serious attention."

> IV. Meaning of Narrative The "meaning" of a narrative is to be identified
> with the author's intended meaning as communicated through the text,

---

[56]Idem, *Poetics*, 9.

[57]Krister Stendahl, "The Bible as a Classic and the Bible as Holy Scripture" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984):9; reprinted in *BFC*, 45.

determined via close literary and theological study of the text, its several levels of context, and its relation to the overarching purpose of Scripture's narratives.

Literary study of a narrative text was the subject of Thesis III; theological study is the main topic under this heading, and is dependent on a clear understanding of Scripture's material principle (Thesis I) and the overall purpose of biblical narratives (Thesis II).[58] Two other questions must be answered before moving on to the theological significance: the nature of "meaning" as it relates to narratives, and the relation of "meaning" to authorial intention.

Aspects of Meaning

"Then he said, 'Your name will no longer be called Jacob, but Israel'" (Genesis 32:29a). The literal meaning of this verse is clear: Jacob was told that his name would be changed to "Israel." However, this simple paraphrase of perhaps the most important verse of the pericope cannot be a full answer to the question of its meaning. Clearly the text has a richer theological significance than this simple restatement of the bare facts implies. It is important to ask the right questions when interpreting a text.

It is clear from the first and second thesis what narratives are and what purpose they serve. They "selectively report history so as to show what God did through Israel and the Patriarchs to accomplish His saving purposes, and so instruct the faithful in God's ways of dealing with man through Law and Gospel." Is their meaning to be identified with their purpose? Certainly this is an important aspect of a narrative's

---

[58]R. Bohlmann, *Principles*, 77: The answer to the question of meaning is implicit in the understanding of narratives as *Scripture* or *Word* of God. "For both 'Word' and 'Scriptures' imply that the Bible is to be read and interpreted as a literary document."

meaning: what it sets out to accomplish. However, this functional definition by itself

is insufficient as an explanation of meaning because it potentially leaves behind the

traditional, literal sense of the text.

Hans Frei assesses Luther and other pre-critical interpreters to have understood

Scripture's narratives to have three aspects of meaning, all of which were always

closely related if not united. These three aspects of meaning were the literal,

explicative sense, the religious, interpretive sense, and the historical reference.[59] These

senses were united, and were not to be pitted against one another, though the subject

matter should be chosen over the words, if necessary.[60]

An attempt to clarify these three aspects of meaning and the different ways that

words are used is supplied by an understanding of semantics.[61] The meaning of

individual words usually is clear. "A man wrestled with him" means "A man wrestled

with him." The difficulty comes at the level of relating sentences and paragraphs. As

was true in Luther's approach to interpretation, a basic premise of a semantic approach

is that the "meaning" of a Hebrew narrative has several closely-related aspects, not all

of which are always recognized. Such a theory does not imply multiple "meanings,"

---

[59]H. Frei, *Eclipse*, 23.

[60]This is also the recommendation of Francis Pieper, who notes that the issue of "content or import" versus "words or 'the letter'" is a red herring. To pit these two against each other is "to perform a logical and psychological impossibility. You cannot understand the content of a message without the words which express that message" (*Christian Dogmatics*, Volume I [St. Louis: Concordia, 1950], 72).

[61]Kevin Vanhoozer, "The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Forms" (pp. 49-104 in D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Hermeneutics. Authority. and Canon* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986]), James Voelz, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 239-40, 244-251, and idem, "The Problem of 'Meaning' in Texts," *Neotestamentica* 23 (1989):33-43. The organization here follows that of both Vanhoozer and Voelz.

but rather helps to explain the different aspects of communication taking place. A brief overview of these different aspects of communication will serve to clarify the understanding of the meaning of Hebrew narrative.

What is customarily referred to as a narrative's *content* (the persons or actions depicted) is termed the "sense" or the "literal meaning." At this point in the interpretation, the reader is interpreting the words on the page, and thereby is able to answer the question, "What does the text say?" The *content* of Genesis 32 would be that Jacob wrestled, was blessed, and received a new name. This is the common, literal, sense-aspect of the words' conventional meaning.

A second aspect of a narrative's communication is its *significance*. This is usually the desired response to the question, "But what does the text really *mean*?" This is the meaning of the actions depicted by the words.[62] Here the traditional method of study usually takes the form of an examination of the various levels of context: the surrounding verses, the chapter, the book, other books by the same author, and Scripture as a whole. (See below, the section on "Contextual Study of Theological Significance," p. 108.) In the traditional method of textual analysis, the pastor studies the text's *significance* for its own proclamation of Law and Gospel, so as to aid him in applying it to his congregation.

In the case of Genesis 32, a theological significance would be that even though Jacob was selfish and patently sinful, yet God still chose him to be the father of His people, even giving him the name "Israel"; God gives His gifts freely of His grace, not

---

[62]J. Voelz, "Biblical Hermeneutics," 245.

on account of merit. This would be a *significance* of the pericope, and is closely related to the narrative's literal sense and its literary form.

Another aspect of narrative communication, that of *implication*, tells the interpreter "what the words of the text or what the deeds/ideas described by those words tell us about the maker of the text itself."[63] As such, the *implication* is not a meaning of the text, though it is possible, even desirable, to consider the author via his product. To determine the *implications* about the author or his audience, the reader must "read between the lines," because this sort of information is rarely supplied by the literal sense of the text. This type of study is employed by both historical-grammatical and historical-critical scholars, though the latter have tended to fixate on this aspect alone, to the virtual exclusion of the others.[64]

The *implications* of Genesis 32 might be that the inspired author knew it to be important that this account be recorded, that he was concerned to report the origins of the sanctuary at Peniel and of the name "Israel," and that he chose to withhold until later in the narrative the fact that Jacob was wrestling with God, and no mere mortal. Though often regarded as an aspect of communication which is of lesser importance, the *implication* of a text has regularly been studied under the heading "isagogics" as an important preliminary task for textual interpretation.

A final aspect of narrative communication is its *application* to the hearer or reader. Here it is acknowledged that a text *does* something to or for a reader. Like

---

[63]Ibid.

[64]See the comments on Historical Criticism earlier in this chapter under Thesis II, the subsection "Didactic Function of History" for more on this issue, especially starting at page 83.

implication, this is not an aspect of a text's "meaning" *per se,* but rather a result or

effect of its literal meaning and theological significance for the receiver. Here the role

of the pastor is central in applying God's Word to the lives of His people--what does it

"mean" for their lives? In this connection it is important to assume that the original

author narrated the particular events for a reason, to achieve a certain purpose.

It is important to understand, though, that narratives were not written as though

they were specifically about modern hearers. Proclamation of simple imitation can

result in moralism (which see, Chapter Five, page 117). Rather, it is the preacher's

privilege to accompany God's Word to the people, to explain the important aspects of

its meaning, and to apply it to their lives. Because he knows their particular sins, the

pastor proclaims God's Word of Law, indicting his parishioners in their sin. He also

proclaims the Word of Gospel, God's Word of forgiveness and grace which covers the

particular sin for which he has just indicted them. The most prominent application, on

the basis of Genesis 32, would be the proclamation of God's grace for sinners, even

for the obvious "me-first" sinners like Jacob.

There is, however, a potential danger in identifying aspects of meaning in

Scripture. As with other theories of communication, distinctions and categories are

observed to be true from human experience over a time, tested repeatedly in different

situations, and then asserted as rules and facts. The pitfall here, as always, is in

unexamined presuppositions. In the case of Scripture, it is assumed that God's

communication with man is necessarily configured in the same way as man's own

observed and analyzed patterns of communication with man. But is it necessarily so

that, since human writing/speech is understood in such a way, so also does God. . . .? Such an assumption (that God's communication functions exactly as does man's) is rarely stated, perhaps as a result of other *a priori* judgments regarding God's nature or capabilities, or concerning the nature of God's Word itself. Yet it is an assumption deserving of careful scrutiny.

As a method of studying <u>human</u> communication (writing, speech, actions, etc.), these theories are a helpful diagnostic tool (though this would no doubt be disputed by some). But the question must be asked: Does the *viva vox Dei* conform to this communication model? Does God always communicate in exactly the same manner as men? Inasmuch as Scripture was mediately inscribed by human authors, the answer is a cautious "yes." The Bible is in no way less than other man-authored compositions. However, the fact (of faith) that it remains at the same time the living voice of God gives one pause to reconsider.

The effect of assuming God was/is a conformist is to lead one to ask further questions: Which aspect of meaning was/is inspired? Which one matters most? Any talk of "levels" or even "aspects" of meaning inevitably leads one to question their order of priority. Indeed, such questions are destabilizing and inimical to God's announced intent for communicating His Word to sinful man: teaching, preaching, believing, saving (see Thesis II, the Purpose of Narratives). Such questions of priority and inspiration could lead to substantial doubts and uncertainties as to the accomplishment of these objectives, a result clearly contrary to God's will as announced in Scripture. While <u>some</u> doubt and tentativeness in interpretation is

inescapable (and would certainly be better than a false sense of security), the end result of these questions would be to focus not on God for the answers to the human problem, but on man.

Yet because man has been given the faculty of reason, he employs it in service of God's special revelation of His Word. Semantics theory is valuable inasmuch as it facilitates clear proclamation of Gospel. With such a caution in place, it is helpful to study His Word in terms of its *content* (literal sense), its *significance* (theology in context), its *implication* (for understanding the author and his world), and its *application* to the hearer/reader. Yet Scripture remains essentially a clear communication of God's Law and Gospel. Attempts to identify multiple meanings or to separate these aspects of communication according to human convention are wrong-headed and contrary to the role of interpretation as being in service of the proclamation of the Gospel. Especially dangerous is the temptation to consider *significance* apart from literal *sense*. It was the eighteenth century separation (and at times opposition) of these two aspects that contributed to the demise of the clear, unified sense of Scripture.[65] Semantics theory is a helpful aide to interpretation of narratives when these cautions are in place.

Most often the primary goal of the interpreter is the *theological significance* of a narrative. One way to get at this aspect of a text's meaning is to identify the themes and ideas present in the narrative through word and context studies. Some helpful guidelines in this connection would be to notice and investigate repeated words and

---

[65]H. Frei, *Eclipse*, 40-46.

idioms and thus determine the main concern of the narrative. Themes define the

central issue in the narrative. Shimon Bar-Efrat sees this as the key to identifying the

meaning of narratives, though with a strong caution concerning the inherent

subjectivity in selecting themes:

> Ideas are the meanings and lessons contained in the narratives, their message or "philosophy." In the majority of cases neither themes nor ideas are stated explicitly. They are implied in the narrative and have to be abstracted by interpretation. . . . one should exercise a great deal of self-restraint and self-criticism before proceeding to the delineation of thematic or ideational structures. Even when dealing with phenomena that are objectively present in the narrative text a certain amount of subjectivity is involved when pointing out structures.[66]

Barbara Green also sees the structure of the narrative as communicating its meaning:

"The plot of the story is one of several ways in which the storyteller seeks to

communicate the basic meaning of the story."[67] As applied to Genesis 32, a main

theme passage can be identified as the action of "naming": requests for names, names

given, identity of names withheld. The very word "name" itself occurs five times in

this pericope, and also serves as the main topic of the extended dialogue. So, one can

conclude that a *theological significance* of the Jacob incident is not to be found in the

act of wrestling (as the earlier literary analysis had also indicated), or in the dietary

---

[66]Shimon Bar-Efrat, "Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative" *Vetus Testamentum* 30 (1980):168-169; reprinted in *BFC*, 200-201. It is clear from this article that the author's use of "structure" is meant in the sense of formalistic analysis and not in the sense of the contemporary movement known as structuralist exegesis. Bar-Efrat illustrates his method of "extracting meaning from structure" by studying the David-Bathsheba-Uriah narrative of 2 Samuel 11: "The meaning to be drawn from this is that the main issue of the narrative is to be sought in David's conduct towards Uriah--his efforts to conceal the consequences of his adultery and his order to have Uriah killed in battle. David's moral baseness is brought out by his behaviour towards Uriah even more than by his conduct towards Bathsheba" (*BFC*, 205).

[67]Barbara Green, "The Plot of the Story of Ruth" *JSOT* 23 (1982):68; reprinted in *BFC*, 218.

prescriptions, but rather in the giving and receiving of the name.

Authorial Intention

Can anything further be said about the author of a narrative and his intentions? Are the aspects of a text's meaning to be equated with the author's intentions? The first thesis clearly affirms the Spirit's inspiration of all Scripture, which carries with it the unity of Scripture's message and content.[68] As such, God's intention in ordaining the writing of Hebrew narratives is clear and has been covered under the first two theses. But what about the <u>human</u> author? Of what value are <u>his</u> intentions? Several positions have been taken on this issue.

As stated earlier, the Evangelical movement's formal principle focused on Scripture as God's Word while their material principle emphasized God's soverign acts throughout recorded history. A corollary of this understanding is their connection of a text's singular and constant meaning with the intentions of the original author. Walter Kaiser makes the bold assertion, "The *author's* intended meaning is what a text means."[69] His deliberately polemical thesis is a helpful corrective to those who would deny the relevance (or even the existence) of an original author, positing instead the importance of a redactor's (or other pre- or post-literary) meaning. Such a forcefully-stated position, however, is rightly questioned by Longman:

> How is it possible to reconstruct an author's intention in a literary work, since he or she may not even have been conscious of it? . . . How can we get back into the mind of the poet? The latter is a problem obviously heightened in the study of an

---

[68]R. Bohlmann, *Principles*, 77.

[69]W. Kaiser, *Exegetical*, 33, emphasis original.

ancient text.[70]

Since the author is no longer available to answer questions as to his intentions in writing, we are at a loss to say anything more about him; it would seem that any such determinations must remain in the realm of speculation. Or must they?

Kaiser is helpful in pointing out the dangers of losing sight of the author. A denial of the sure and certain connection between authorial intent and textual meaning has serious implications. If such a denial is granted, then one must assume either an intentionless text, a text with an intention unknown to the author, or a text whose author's intent is merely coincidental with the text's meaning. Such would be the possible discontinuous relationships between the author and the text in the case of a humanly-authored document. However, this is not necessarily the case if one grants the unique nature of Scripture as divinely-authored by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Such a view would invalidate the prior presupposition of the text as merely humanly-authored. Faith confesses that men and women did receive the revelation of God's message and thus wrote by this divine inspiration, and so another answer must be sought regarding their intentions.

Is it allowable simply to equate the divine intent with the human author's intent? This is Kaiser's view,[71] but again Longman rightly questions such a rigid equation, showing that "the prophets wrote better than they knew"[72] by pointing to 1

---

[70]T. Longman, *Literary Approaches*. 19-20.

[71]W. Kaiser, *Exegetical*. 108-111.

[72]T. Longman, *Literary Approaches*. 65-66 and n. 1.

Peter 1:10-12 (NASB):

> As to this salvation, the prophets, who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven--things into which angels long to look.

So what *can* be known about the author of the narrative? In the case of Genesis 32, the Bible itself informs the reader that the author was Moses.[73] Does it matter, though, that in the case of other narrative histories (e.g., 1 and 2 Samuel) an author is never specifically identified? Is it necessary to know with certainty who the original author was?

Here is where redaction- and tradition-criticism take their departure, choosing to identify multiple "authors" in the numerous layers of oral and written transmission, leading up to the final editors who combined the documents according to their own theological schematizations. In some cases this whole process is then subsumed under an umbrella of divine inspiration. Does such a view fit with the first thesis? In the case of the Pentateuch this is clearly contrary to Scripture's own ascription of Mosaic authorship (even though, as we have seen, Moses himself served as an editor of sorts, drawing on other writings as sources). But there is another issue at stake in the case

---

[73]The assertion and explanation of Moses as author of the Pentateuch as a whole and of Genesis 32 in particular is a much larger and more complicated question. Certainly the New Testament credits Moses with the final authority over the contents of the Pentateuch, whether as author or as collector of earlier written sources (see the section "Selectively Reported" under Thesis II, "Purpose of Narratives"). John 5:45-47 (46: [Jesus said,] "If you believed in Moses, you would believe in me, for he wrote of me"); Luke 16:29, 31("They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them"); Acts 3:22 ("Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up. . . .'" [Deuteronomy 18:15-16]); 15:21 ("For from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every sabbath in the synagogues").

of Hebrew narratives, prior to the question of whether or not the author is known.

That issue is the nature of narrative as Scripture (Thesis I). If faith recognizes the

primary author of Hebrew narrative as God the Holy Spirit, then the most important

issue is <u>not</u> the name of the human author (though there certainly was one), or whether

or not he employed oral or written sources in his composition (neither of which would

mitigate against divine inspiration since the authors themselves note such use).[74] To

know the author and exact time of writing is helpful in interpreting the text of

Scripture, and when these facts are supplied they may at times prove invaluable to the

interpreter, especially in terms of the text's *implications* and *significances*. However,

the most important issue is the confession of the <u>divine</u> author-ity of Hebrew

narratives as God's Word, and His gracious intention in communicating with mankind.

This divine intention is unimpeachable and unchanging. From this conviction (faith)

naturally flows a concern for the text's historical setting and its author.

Can it be maintained, then, that the (human) authorial intent is commensurate

with the text's meaning? A difficulty can be noticed in the case of Evangelicalism's

biblical interpretation, whose focus on the human author and whose understanding of

narrative as Scripture lacks the Gospel as material principle. Such a close focus on

the author without the guidance of a material principle results in the validity of an

interpretation resting squarely on the <u>author</u> and <u>his intentions</u>. Kaiser does "relate

meaning to the text, but it is always secondarily the text and primarily the intention of

---

[74]Cf. Numbers 21:14; Joshua 10:13; 1 Samuel 10:25; 1 Kings 11:41; 14:19, 29; et al.

its author"[75] that matters in determining a text's meaning. But since apart from his text the author is not available to confirm or deny any deductions as to his intentions, a contemporary interpreter's presuppositions concerning authorship can play a prominent role in these endeavors to enter the mind of the ancient author, thus making it a dubiously subjective enterprise.

But is there warrant for such an incursion into the mind of the author? As noted earlier, its results would seem to be beyond the realm of proof. Kaiser had earlier stated, "'Meaning' is that which is represented by a text, its grammar, and the author's truth-intentions as indicated by his use of words."[76] But in the end it is a false dichotomy to force one to choose between the author's words and his intentions. Though it is humanly demonstrable that an author may write something either contrary to or unaware of its significance, it is problematic to question the relationship between his *intent* and his *words*, since lack of intent (or differing intent) is just as unverifiable as the consonance of intent with words. It is all the more dubious on account of faith's confession that Scripture is no mere humanly-authored text, but is unique in its being divinely inspired of God by the Holy Spirit. Further probing into the distinction between authorial intent and textual meaning would only lead to further unanswered questions as to the "how?" of divine inspiration. Since Evangelicals determine authorial intent in light of their material principle of the sovereignty of God and His inscrutable acts in history, they forfeit a clear statement of the very Gospel from

---

[75]W. Kaiser, *Exegetical.* 33.

[76]Ibid., 32.

which their name ("Evangelical") derives.

Thus the interpreter must focus on the *words* of Scripture as being of primary importance, while assuming authorial intent to be consonant with the words of the text. This is the approach advocated by Sternberg, who makes the connection between author's intentions and narrative text: "The reticent narrator gives us no clue about his intentions except in and through his art of narrative."[77] Thus the narrative text itself remains the primary focus of the interpreter, its literal sense serving as a guide to its theological significance.

Contextual Study of Theological Significance

A contextual-theological study of Hebrew narrative relates the prominent words and themes of the narrative to its several levels of context and to the overarching purpose of Scripture's narratives. This was already demonstrated to a certain extent in the second chapter as a part of the interpretation notes (pages 18-24), where the "theological context" was discussed. So this section will serve as a brief review of the value of a narrative's several contexts, as well as development of that concept in light of the further discussion of "meaning" in this chapter and the "overarching purpose of Scripture's narratives" under the second thesis.

The first context to consider is the historical context of the pericope in the setting of the whole book. This step is often referred to under the heading of isagogics, and corresponds in part to the text's aspect of *implication*: what does the

---

[77]M. Sternberg, *Poetics*, 1; also a part of *BFC*, 234; originally published as "The Bible's Art of Persuasion: Ideology, Rhetoric, and Poetics in Saul's Fall" *Hebrew Union College Annual* 54 (1983):45.

text reveal about the author and his setting? This information on the historical and cultural milieu helps to understand the words and idioms used in the text. It also allows the interpreter to relate the text's *theological significance* to its historical background: why was the text written this way at this time? In this way a possible glimpse is granted at the author's intention in recording the narrative event.

The next level of context to consider is that of the chapter or section. How does this particular story fit in to the bigger picture? In the case of Genesis 32 the interpreter would do well first to consider the pericope's relation to this particular time in Jacob's life (Genesis 32-33), and then to the entire Jacob cycle (Genesis 25, 27-36).

Finally, as we have seen, the interpreter relates the account to the larger settings of the Pentateuch, the Old Testament, and to all of Scripture.[78] What does the text say about God? What does it say about man? What theological *loci* (e.g., justification, sanctification, Christology, covenant, eschatology) are mentioned in the text? At this point a clear understanding of the pericope's themes and theological significance is important, as they will be seen in light of the unifying theme of Scripture: justification of the sinner by grace in terms of Law and Gospel. Not only is this in accord with Scripture's own self-proclaimed material principle, but it is also according to common sense that a passage be interpreted in light of its larger context.[79]

---

[78]As a further aid to proclamation in the setting of the divine service, the liturgical usage of a pericope should also be considered at this point, noting how the text is employed (if at all) in parts of the liturgy and on what Sundays or other occasions the text is appointed for reading (noting also with which other texts the pericope is matched).

[79]This point is made in the Apology of the Augsburg Confession (IV.280) in response to the isolated quotations offered by the Romanists in support of their doctrines: "It is necessary to consider passages in their context, because according to the common rule it is improper in an argument to judge or reply to a single passage without taking the whole law into account. When passages are considered

Just such a clear understanding of the text's theological significance is what the

preacher needs in order clearly to proclaim a sermon based on a Hebrew narrative.

Conclusions

Thus we may return to the issue with which this chapter began: a hermeneutic

for narrative proclamation. Presuppositions and a method for the interpretation of

Hebrew narratives have been presented in the form of four theses that promote a

Lutheran use of text-immanent exegesis.

> I. Narrative as Scripture As divinely-inspired Word of God whose primary
> author is the Holy Spirit (formal principle), a clear understanding and affirmation
> of Hebrew narratives is granted by the same Spirit through faith, which
> confesses their central message (material principle) as the Gospel of God's
> gracious forgiveness for Christ's sake given through faith.

> II. Purpose of Narrative Such an understanding of Hebrew narratives highlights
> their purpose in selectively reporting History so as to show by example what
> God did through Israel and the Patriarchs to accomplish His saving purposes,
> and so to instruct the faithful in God's ways of dealing with man through Law
> and Gospel.

> III. Literary Value of Narrative As humanly-written documents worthy of no
> less a status than "good literature," Hebrew narratives require a close reading so
> as to determine the author's competent and historically conditioned use of literary
> devices (e.g., metaphor, parallelism, plot development, characterization) in
> retelling the actual events of salvation history.

> IV. Meaning of Narrative The "meaning" of a narrative is to be identified with
> the author's intended meaning as communicated through the text, determined via
> close literary and theological study of the text, its several levels of context, and
> its relation to the overarching purpose of Scripture's narratives.

After restating the formal and material principles of Scripture as they apply

specifically to Hebrew narratives, their purpose as a part of salvation history is shown

---

in their own context, they often yield their own interpretation" (T. Tappert, ed., *Book of Concord*, 149).

in that they are not isolated events being reported but rather are connected to the bigger story of God's plan of redemption. In this light they can be seen as concrete examples of God's Law and Gospel actions for the benefit and deliverance of His people. Only faith can confess such an understanding of Hebrew narratives as Scripture and receive with thanksgiving their message of salvation.

Once these presuppositions are clearly understood the reader is ready to consider the narratives as literature. The starting point for this consideration is with the text of the narrative itself, with its *literal meaning*. This was demonstrated in Chapter Two. There is no substitute for careful exegetical study of the narrative in its original language, for in this setting the important details of metaphor, word plays, characterization and plot development are noted. These literary devices illustrate the author's artful use of language and are helpful in determining his intentions in writing the text. In the case of narratives, since the author is unavailable for comment apart form his text, it is from his text alone that his intentions must be determined.

In the case of the Genesis 32 pericope, it was shown that the narrative itself highlights the importance of the dialogue at the conclusion of the wrestling match. It is theologically significant that God fulfilled His promise and blessed Jacob--one of the "saints who [were] weak in faith"[80]--in spite of Jacob's selfish and sinful past. While Jacob could still have refused this blessing, the recurring theme of "naming" suggests that it was God's gracious intention to give him the new name "Israel."

From the narrative's *literal sense*, from its *implications* about the author and his

---

[80]LW, 6:152, from Luther's 1542 sermon on Genesis 32.

world, and from its nuances and emphases as seen through the author's careful use of language, a narrative's *theological significance* is determined from a study of and comparison with its several levels of context. Once the theological significance is determined, the preacher is prepared for the homiletical task of application, the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

HOMILETICS FOR NARRATIVE PROCLAMATION

Martin Marty has noted the recent emphasis on the connections between

narrative and homiletics. He sums up the possible relations between the two in a

simple, light-hearted way:

> To review: tell biblical stories, tell stories that help people "get" biblical stories,
> tell stories to help bridge biblical and contemporary worlds, tell stories that
> discern and give shape to congregational life, and you have four different things
> in mind. Whoever has ears to hear, let her or him hear.[1]

So in what way can or should the preacher tell these biblical stories? This

chapter will examine the various homiletical methods currently in use by those who

preach from Old Testament narratives. As such the approach will be primarily

phenomenological: the observed activity of narrative proclamation will be classified

according to various types. These different types will naturally depend on the inherent

presuppositions concerning the text (as presented in the previous chapter) as well as

one's understanding of the role of the text in the sermon and the definition of the

preaching task. Such an organizational strategy, while perhaps seeming backward in

orientation, is actually reflective of a deeper philosophical issue. Does *practice*

necessarily follow *theory*? Is a clearly defined theoretical basis even necessary for the

---

[1]Martin Marty, "Preachers, Get Your Story Straight," *Context: A Commentary on the Interaction of Religion and Culture* 24, 2 (Jan. 1992):3-4.

113

practice of narrative proclamation? Though this chapter is not intended to answer the question of priority between practice and theory, it would seem through experience and observation that the answer to both of these questions is "no." The best-laid plans of hermeneuticians and preachers can be (and often are) pushed aside when the assured results of a particular interpretive theory do not yield any preachable product for the Christian pulpit.[2] Though one set of presuppositions may be intended, the homiletical result may flow from another set.

Therefore this chapter will examine the role of the text in the sermon and the preaching task itself by employing the last chapter's understanding of literal meaning and its theological significance for the purpose of application. Christian proclamation of Hebrew narrative is the pastoral task of applying to the parishioner the interpreted narrative as a specific message of Law, diagnosing the hearer's malady, and Gospel, stating God's redeeming grace grounded in the historical particularity of the text.[3] A number of observed methods for proclamation of narratives will be analyzed, together with those who have publicly promoted them. The importance of clear Gospel proclamation on the basis of narrative pericopes will be defended in light of these

---

[2]Donald Gowan describes the lack of continuity between biblical scholarship and Christian preaching: "And I dare say that that material [the various methods of biblical criticism] has been either rejected as untrue or put to one side as irrelevant to the work of a pastor. Seldom can one imagine the Documentary Hypothesis adding fire to one's preaching. . . . I fear that form criticism, et al., may take their place along with the Documentary Hypothesis as pedantry best left out of the way when a sermon is to be prepared" (*Reclaiming the Old Testament for the Christian Pulpit* [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980], 2). Gowan is primarily concerned with maintaining the relevancy of higher-critical presuppositions in narrative interpretation; however, other and perhaps less-hidden agendas on the part of the preacher may just as easily surpass his concern for right interpretation when it comes time for proclamation. See below, "Non-Textual" and "Allegorical" methods.

[3]Adapted from Richard R. Caemmerer, *Preaching for the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 68.

methods. Critique will be based on how each method resolves the hermeneutical

questions raised in the introduction and in the previous chapter (the method's

faithfulness to presuppositions for interpretation, and the question of a narrative's

meaning), and their ability to facilitate Gospel proclamation on the basis of a narrative

text. Some methods will be shown to be of little value for the Lutheran preacher,

while others, judged according to these criteria, will be seen as serviceable and even

indispensable. First, several unsatisfactory methods will be presented briefly, followed

by a more in-depth treatment of those of more value for the Christian preacher.

Non-textual Methods

By "non-textual" this category refers to those sermons which exhibit a strong

discontinuity between the announced text and the ensuing message. Other common

epithets would be "Text as Pretext" (epitomized by the sermon which is written on a

preestablished theme or issue, after which a text is sought to substantiate it) or

"Catchword Springboard" (beginning with a text, then departing from it via one of its

words to some other, unrelated topic). The problem with this approach is that while

there might be a superficial congruence of the sermon's theme with the *literal meaning*

of the narrative, the *theological significance* of the text has either been overlooked or

ignored as inconsequential to the sermon's *application*. Examples of such preaching

would include employing the account of Jonathan and David to preach on "Just a

Perfect Friendship" or the account of Hannah for a Mother's Day address.[4] While such

---

[4]Alton Wedel, *The Mighty Word: Power and Purpose of Preaching.* The Preacher's Workshop Series, Book 1 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), 15. Wedel offers other examples of how a preacher might abuse Scripture to "promote [his] favorite cause or ride [his] favorite steed": Nehemiah 2:17-18 ("Then

preaching might well be Christian proclamation, it is clearly not textual preaching,[5] and as such is of no further concern for this study.

Allegorical Methods

With a prominent pedigree going all the way back through Origen and Augustine, the allegorical method of interpretation has been a common technique for dealing with difficult narrative texts. Its basic premise is that a text is rich in meaning, so rich, in fact, that the surface-level, literal meaning is but a stepping stone to the deeper spiritual levels of meaning, not all of which need relate to or even resemble the literal meaning. As noted in the last chapter, though, *theological significance* must not be separated from the narrative's *literal meaning*.[6] It is up to the interpreter to discover these meanings. St. Augustine provides an example of this method based on the parable of the Good Samaritan:

> *A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho;* Adam himself is meant; *Jerusalem* is the heavenly city of peace, from whose blessedness Adam fell; *Jericho* means the moon and signifies our mortality, because it is born, waxes, wanes, and dies. *Thieves* are the devil and his angels. *Who stripped him,* namely of his immortality; *and beat him,* by persuading him to sin; *and left him half-dead,* because in so far as man can understand and know God, he lives, but in so far as he is wasted and oppressed by sin, he is dead; he is therefore called half-

---

I said to them, 'You see the bad situation we are in . . . Let us rise up and build'") as a text for a sermon urging sanctuary renovation; Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22:3b: "[Abraham] split wood for the burnt offering") for Boy Scout Sunday.

[5]The topic of "topical" versus "textual" preaching has proven to be fuel for the homiletical fire for many a writer. It shall not be so here. Since this is not a central concern, it will be assumed that both types are "allowable," even desirable. It is further assumed that both types are textual, in that, though one starts with the text and the other the idea, they both proclaim a specific message from God's Word.

[6]See "Aspects of Meaning," pages 95 to 101.

dead. . . .[7]

Such interpretation clearly focuses on the text. Then, just as clearly, it moves around

it, focusing instead on a deeper, unrelated spiritual meaning. In this light it is similar

to the non-textual methods described above since it also allows the preacher arbitrarily

to assign meaning to the text apart from its literal sense (though, as was also

mentioned earlier, such whimsical subjectivity was not characteristic of the likes of

Origen or Augustine). It is also a convenient solution to the dilemma of a preacher

who doubts the veracity of an account, since this method does not require a

presupposition of textual historicity.[8]

True allegorical preaching is a rarity in modern-day pulpits, perhaps as a result

of its rather transparent mistreatment of the plain, literal sense of the narrative text.

Whatever the reason for its scarcity, though, it is not textual preaching, and thus (like

the "Non-textual" Methods described above) merits no further discussion here.[9]

Moralizing Methods

One final preliminary method which must be mentioned briefly, if only for the

---

[7]Augustine, *Quaestiones Evangeliorum* II, 19, cited in Edgar McKnight, *The Bible and the Reader: An Introduction to Literary Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), xii. Other examples could include preaching the list of animals prohibited from being eaten (Leviticus 11) as being symbolic of Christian vices to be avoided, or the scarlet cord hanging from Rahab's window, which saved her and her family from destruction (Joshua 2:18), as actually being a message that we are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ.

[8]A classic example of Enlightenment's allegorical "retreat from the text" is Bultmann's well-known program of "demythologization" (Mark Ellingsen, *The Integrity of Biblical Narrative: Story in Theology and Proclamation* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990], 18).

[9]See Martin Brauer, "The Allegorical Method of Preaching on Narrative Texts" (B.D. thesis, 1946, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis) for a thorough discussion and rebuttal of this method as it applied to both Old and New Testament narratives and parables.

fact that it occurs frequently from Christian pulpits, is the moralistic exhortation to imitate the characters and their actions or decisions as portrayed in the narrative. It presupposes a high view of Scripture as God's Word, leading to a reverential treatment of the plain, literal sense of the text and its divinely-inspired examples for godly living. Also, it operates on the unexamined presupposition that the actions and decisions of narratives' characters were recorded for the purpose of being imitated.

To a certain extent this last assumption is true. St. Paul exhorts his readers to imitate him (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 2 Thessalonians 3:7). James urges his listeners, "as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord" (James 5:10). Hebrews 11 also commends the faith of the ancients, though it warns against following the example of those who fell through disobedience (Hebrews 4:11). Clearly, the point of exhortation to imitation is the faith by which the saints believed, and through which they lived their lives.

To a certain extent, however, this assumption is also false. As shown in the second thesis of Chapter Four, the purpose of narratives is primarily theological and Christocentric, that is, illustrating the Gospel through the examples of what God did to accomplish His saving purposes. Only secondarily are narratives to serve as examples of how to live (or not to live) as a child of God (though they also do serve that purpose). Exhortations to faithful imitation of narratives flounder on the false assumption that narratives were written to speak directly to each parishioner's situation. Luther made this same observation in his "How Christians Should Regard

Moses," saying that one should pay closest attention to what is "for you."[10] Douglas

Stuart summarizes this point well:

> Perhaps the single most useful bit of caution we can give you about reading
> and learning from narratives is this: Do not be a monkey-see-monkey-do reader of
> the Bible. No Bible narrative was written specifically about *you.* . . . *You* can
> always learn a great deal . . . from all the Bible's narratives, but you can never
> assume that God expects you to do exactly the same things that Bible characters
> did, or to have the same things happen to you that happened to them.[11]

Stuart's advice is balanced and helpful. While providing a corrective for those who

would simply mimic Hebrew narrative persons and their actions, he also notes their

didactic value for the faithful. As the New Testament passages also emphasize, the

point of comparison is the <u>faith</u> of the Bible characters and the good works which

were a result of that faith.

When this emphasis is lost, such exhortation to imitation fails in being able to

facilitate clear Gospel proclamation since it is primarily Law-oriented and

anthropocentric in nature: It focuses only on <u>man's</u> actions, ignoring what God has

done. There is no Gospel in ethical exhortation to follow an example, only Law; the

preacher gives out nothing of God's gracious forgiveness, but rather only cruel

demands, demands which cannot be fulfilled. Though it certainly is salutary to

proclaim and give thanks for the lives of the saints (from both Old and New

Testament times), any encouragement to the emulation of their faithful actions and

decisions is Gospel only inasmuch as it is presented as faith's thankful response to that

---

[10]LW, 35:171. For a full discussion of Luther on this point, see p. 47 of Chapter Three, especially n. 67.

[11]Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 85, emphases original.

same Good News which the congregation and the faithful narratees have in common. Only that preaching which proclaims God's unconditional, unmerited Gospel of Jesus Christ through faith can be called an essentially Christian sermon. Such a method with the potential to do just that is considered next.

Expository-Didactic Methods

The methods subsumed under the banner "expository preaching" are many and diverse. In its most general use it can refer to any type of sermon that is based on a text of Scripture. As such it is virtually synonymous with "textual preaching." Often, though, its referent is more specific, indicating a method which treats a text verse-by-verse with the intention of preaching the important truths contained therein. This is often the case in the so-called "mainline Protestant" churches, where "proclamation" is essentially synonymous with "teaching." This is the method intended here by the term "Expository-Didactic."

Several potential benefits of this approach are clear in light of a Hebrew narrative's value as Scripture (Thesis I), its (salvation-) historical purpose (Thesis II), and its literary value as a good story (Thesis III). Such a verse-by-verse exposition certainly would highlight the value of every verse of Scripture as being divinely inspired, inerrant and, thus, valuable for the modern-day hearer/reader. This method would also allow for a careful and detailed explication of a narrative's connection to the grander scheme of salvation history, as well as its author's emphases as determined through literary analyses of the narrative.

The potential handicaps of this method depend on one's definition of the

preaching task and are closely related to the method's benefits. The close exposition

of each verse is better suited to a goal of <u>teaching</u> than <u>proclaiming</u>.[12] While this

method could certainly produce a specific message of Law and Gospel grounded in the

historical particularity of the text and its relation to God's ultimate deliverance for

Christ's sake, it is more likely to produce a sermon that teaches <u>about</u> the Bible and

that relies on a material principle other than the Gospel. This is the case in the

method of Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.

A prominent and widely-published proponent of this approach, Kaiser presents

his own method of exegesis for proclamation in *Toward an Exegetical Theology:*

Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching. For Kaiser, "homiletics" is <u>narrowly</u>

defined as "textual expository preaching," and is essentially a method of Bible study.[13]

As we have already seen, he upholds a doctrine of Scripture and a view of

proclamation which are typical of "mainline Evangelicalism": a high view of the

inspiration and authority of Scripture and a primarily didactic/expository function for

preaching. As such he will serve as an example for the Expository-Didactic Methods.

His proposal for interpreting and applying Scripture is entitled the "syntactical-

theological" method (an expansion or development of "grammatical-historical"

exegesis), a method which is applicable to both Old and New Testament preaching

texts. This method includes five (self-explanatory) analytical processes: contextual,

---

[12]Though these tasks were essentially similar in the later Luther (see p. 40 of Chapter Three, especially n. 48), such is rarely the case today.

[13]Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981), 205 (emphases original): "Good preaching has a twofold job: it must teach the *content* of truth as set forth in each passage and it must also suggest a *reproducible method* of Bible study."

syntactical, verbal, theological, and homiletical.[14] These steps necessitate that the

sermon outline must follow the outline of the text. Only in so doing, Kaiser

maintains, is the preacher a faithful proclaimer of God's Word.

The central chapter ("Homiletical Analysis," *Exegetical,* Chapter 7) discusses

the all-important fifth step in his sermon-study paradigm. He employs a method of

transporting the text's meaning from the "then" to the "now" that he labels

"principlizing."

> To "principlize" is to state the author's propositions, arguments, narrations,
> and illustrations in timeless abiding truths with special focus on the application
> of those truths to the current needs of the Church.[15]

He insists on the removal of specific scriptural referents (e.g., names, places, dates)

from this formulation of "timeless abiding truths" so as to guard against the

phenomenon of "sermon-as-history-lecture." The point is well taken, though it would

seem the loss of historical specificity and the resultant danger of simple moralism

would be prominent. While the preacher must recognize and proclaim the truths from

the text that are applicable to any time, he must also remember that these truths are

never apart from time.

Overall, Kaiser's method is a helpful guide for careful, exegetical study of a

text. However, his zealous concern for the sermon's faithfulness to Scripture's clear,

single intent seems almost drastic at times:

---

[14]W. Kaiser, *Exegetical,* 69-164.

[15]W. Kaiser, *Exegetical,* 152. This appeal to trans-cultural, timeless universals is briefly defined elsewhere as "put[ting] the teachings and doctrines . . . into the form of propositions (i.e., main points in a preaching outline) that will call the hearers to some type of response" (*Exegetical,* 151).

The indentations and levels of subordination indicated in the syntactical analysis for each paragraph [of the biblical text] ought to help us decide which phrases, clauses, or even sentences are to be chosen for highlighting in the subpoints [of the sermon].[16]

These "indentations and levels of subordination" are determined via close scrutiny of the text. There one identifies the subordinating or connecting relationships between phrases and clauses within sentences, and between sentences within paragraphs.[17] A block diagram of the pericope is then used to study and illustrate the connection of these units to the central, or theme, proposition of the text.[18]

Kaiser's faithfulness to Scripture's literal sense is indeed laudable. The textual preacher is certainly bound to the text and its specific message as the basis for his sermon. However, Kaiser's tight restrictions placed on the proclaimer are characteristic of his apparent aversion to creative input in terms of sermon structure and organization.[19] Such a restriction would seem to hamper the preacher's (God-ordained!) responsibility to apply the Word to his people in a way that will convict them of their specific sins and engage their renewed interest through equally specific proclamation of the Gospel. The ability of Kaiser's method to facilitate proclamation of the Gospel is limited to what the preacher can relate to the events in the narrative.

---

[16]W. Kaiser, *Exegetical,* 159.

[17]Ibid., 96.

[18]To his credit, Kaiser supplies eight "Illustrations of Syntactical and Homiletical Analysis" (the title of chapter 8, pp. 165-181) in *Exegetical*--four from Old Testament texts and four from the New Testament. No examples of narrative texts were given.

[19]A further reference will serve to clarify this common "Evangelical" emphasis of Kaiser's: "Time and again the exegete may be saved from would-be disaster and the perils of subjectivism by relying on the text's own pattern of emphasis. . . ." (*Exegetical,* 156).

Thus the expository-didactic method, as narrowly defined, is valuable in its stress on expositing the particular message of a narrative text through careful study of its contexts, syntax, vocabulary and theological import. It is problematic in stressing "timeless principles" from individual verses apart from concrete historical setting as a means to bridge the meaning from the "then" to the "now." This method of bridging can result in allegory or moralism. The emphasis on "timeless principles" would seem to be in accord with the second thesis on narrative purpose (part three, "Didactic Function," p. 80 to 85). However, the Expository-Didactic method fails to focus on the historical specificity of God's actions of Law and Gospel. So in spite of its benefit of focusing (at least initially) on the text, this method of <u>teaching</u> is not ideally suitable for the goal of <u>proclamation</u> of the historically-particular Gospel.

One aspect of preaching narratives that is common to nearly all methods is the need to recount the recorded events to the awaiting listeners. The next method turns this need into a virtue, focusing exclusively on the sermon as narrative reenactment.

Narrative Retelling Methods

The widespread phenomenon of biblical illiteracy among churchgoers will almost certainly necessitate a retelling of the narrative chosen as the sermon text, especially in the case of lesser-known accounts. This review of the narrative's events can take different forms: perfunctory paraphrase, simple rereading of the text, dramatic monologue or dialogue (depending on the text's narratees), or even "chancel drama" re-presentation of the scene depicted by the narrative. Though each of these methods no doubt has its own appropriate time and place, what has recently become

prominent in the field of Hebrew narrative proclamation is the "narrative sermon."

Similar in form to the inductive method of homiletics popularized by Fred

Craddock in his *Overhearing the Gospel: Preaching and Teaching the Faith to Persons*

Who Have Already Heard,[20] this method of narrative proclamation specifically for Old

Testament narratives is best exemplified by John Holbert in his recent book *Preaching*

Old Testament: Proclamation and Narrative in the Hebrew Bible.[21] The basic premise

of this method is that the listener's response (both that of the text's original and

contemporary audiences) is crucial to correct interpreting and preaching.[22] The

preacher's task, then, is to "regenerate the impact of some portion of the text" on the

modern-day congregation of listeners.[23]

An initial concern of the pastor using this method would be to determine what

effect the narrative had on its original audience. In some cases the response is clearly

recorded in the text itself (or in a later reference to that same text). But what if such

comments are not found?[24] Here he will have to rely on a study of the context and

the resulting understanding of the original listeners through their previous actions, that

---

[20]F. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel: Preaching and Teaching the Faith to Persons Who Have Already Heard* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978).

[21]J. Holbert, *Preaching Old Testament: Proclamation and Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991); cf. also Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), who devotes a significant amount of his book to the literature of the Old Testament, including individual sections on Psalms, Proverbs and narratives.

[22]See the reader-response section at the end of Chapter Three for elaboration of this highly significant and controversial hermeneutic.

[23]T. Long, *Literary Forms*, 33.

[24]D. Gowan (*Reclaiming*, 17) also notices this problem, resorting instead to a reliance (in the case of texts from the pen of the so-called "Deuteronomist") on an understanding of the overall Deuteronomistic (or other redactors') theology to explicate the text and its author's intention.

is, he would have to make an educated guess as to the first hearers' response. In both

cases, though, the pastor would do well to consider carefully how the people reacted

(or might have reacted, in the latter instance) to the text, thus giving him a glimpse of

how his own people might receive it. This will assist him in determining a text's Law

(accusing, condemning) or Gospel (forgiving, delivering) reception by the people.

A danger arises, though, when the text's reception by the listeners in the pew is

overemphasized to the point where it becomes equivalent in stature to concerns with a

text's meaning. While *application* is an important aspect of a text's meaning (see page

98-99 on the aspect of *application*), it is necessarily dependent on a text's *literal sense*,

its *implication* about the author and original hearers, and its theological *significance*.

These concerns are preliminary to the aspect of *application*. It would seem, in this

case, that *application* is greatly minimized, even to the point that it is all a function of

the listeners' own conclusions. Certainly it is important to recognize and take into

account how the listening parishioners will understand the narrative and the sermon

preached thereon, but if the meaning of a text depends on its audience, then the

objective perspicuity of Scripture would be lost. The resulting plethora of meanings

(each dependent on a different listener) would relegate the role of the text in

determining meaning to being analogous to the role of an automobile's starter in

determining an engine's performance. The pastor must be careful to avoid the utter

subjectivity that accompanies this shift of the locus of meaning from the text to the

audience/listener.[25] Certainly the preacher must consider his congregation's potential

---

[25]Such a danger is carefully noted by both Long and Holbert, who maintain that the text
controls the reaction of the audience today in the same way as it did originally. Thus the listener's

response to the sermon; such concerns, though, are a part of proclamation and as such must <u>follow</u> the task of exegeting and interpreting the text itself. Several promising possibilities for this method of narrative retelling have recently been proposed.

Holbert suggests two methods of narrative proclamation which he labels the "Pure Narrative Sermon" and the "Frame Narrative Sermon."[26] The pure narrative sermon is just that--a retelling of the account, perhaps dramatically embellished and with allusion to other related events, with no words of explanation given.[27] The frame narrative sermon incorporates prefatory words from the preacher to set the stage and guide the listeners' hearing and understanding of the text. Then the preacher as narrator tells the story (*a la* the "pure narrative" sermon). After retelling the narrative (and perhaps also at times interspersed throughout) he adds further comments to make sure the congregation did not miss the point intended by the text. In effect, the pastor serves as both "color commentator" and "play-by-play announcer" for the action taking place in the text of the narrative. This is necessary because of the lack of knowledge

---

response is guided by the objective. determinable meaning of the text; see J. Holbert, *Preaching.* 10-12. and T. Long, *Literary Forms.* 29, where he writes: "Texts have a certain reality. This is the crucial point. In a variety of ways the reality of biblical texts has signaled to the community of faith those texts' special status as Scripture. Now they signal to the careful reader how they are to be read. Thus the texts themselves govern the rhetorical possibilities." The important question of who would qualify as a "careful reader" is not discussed; see Thesis IV in Chapter Four on the meaning of narratives under the subsection "The Competent Reader," p. 87. For more on reader-response analysis, see the summary at the end of Chapter Three, p. 62.

[26]J. Holbert, *Preaching.* 42-45 (explanation of the methods), 79-115 (sample sermons).

[27]Though the goal in both the pure narrative sermon and the retelling sections of the frame narrative sermon is to objectively re-narrate the story without explanation, the preacher has numerous important decisions to make, suggesting that the process is never completely objective. For example, he obviously must decide how to inflect his voice, what gestures to make, what facial expressions to use; all of these are aspects of communication which are at times equally (if not more) important than the spoken words, and all of which guide the audience's reception of the narrative, thus requiring subjective decisions of interpretation on the part of the preacher.

and understanding on the part of the parishioners, who likely have not studied the text well enough to enable them easily to perceive the theological significance of the text.

Thus, by way of summary and critique, both of Holbert's narrative retelling methods succeed in illustrating the Hebrew narrative as one part in the larger picture of salvation history, and also allow the historical particularity of this specific event to serve as a clear point of comparison for the parishioner to the narratee's experience of God's actions of Law and Gospel. Relevant application to the congregation may be inferred (by the talented preacher/narrator) in the "Pure Narrative" sermon, while the "Frame Narrative" sermon allows it to be explained by way of an aside or concluding summary.

One danger with these methods is the presupposition that the role of determining meaning is in some way shared by both the text and listener, leading to a potentially destabilizing subjectivity. And though the preacher does make some attempt through his emphases in retelling to guide the listener's perceptions, the *application* aspect of a narrative is minimized, in that the reader is left to draw his/her own conclusions. Since the meaning of the text is clear in and of itself apart from its reception by the audience, the value of this method comes with the focus on how the listener hears and understands this meaning. The main objection to the "Pure Narrative" retelling method is its inability to facilitate clear Gospel proclamation, the absence of which relegates the sermon (half-)hour to being little more than story time, and potentially not even Christian story time at that. Clearly the "Frame Narrative" method allows for Christian proclamation of the Gospel, and would certainly serve the

purpose of being a provocative, occasional supplement to the regular preaching fare. But what is this "regular fare" when dealing with narrative texts? For most, it is one or both of the remaining two methods.

Identification-Analogy Methods

A common approach to the proclamation of narrative texts is that of identification or analogy. This is the understanding espoused by William Thompson, who was quoted in the introduction to Chapter One as saying that this type of preaching is "probably the easiest." It is easy because parishioners can "identify" with the narratees--they can "get into" the story world of the narrative. The basic approach here is characterized by the setting up of an analogy between the people of the congregation and the people in the text. This comparison may be based on similar human conditions or experiences, similar divine actions or promises, or some element of both human and divine similarity.

What is intended by Thompson (and most proponents or users of this method) is an analogy based primarily on the human condition--similar life experiences of problems, joys, and so forth. Indeed, this is an effective method of connecting the congregation with the world narrated by the text. Modern-day listeners are actively involved in a sermon that shows how the biblical narrative is also a part of their own story. However, if the comparison stops at the point of merely the similar human condition, then the preacher has no avenue for proclaiming the Gospel. The common human experience is governed by the Law, with no knowledge of the Gospel apart from faith receiving the special revelation of God in Scripture. The danger in a

strictly anthropocentric method of scriptural interpretation and proclamation is that it can easily devolve into moralism, leaving out the possibility of a divine solution for the human dilemma.

This problem is solved by those who advocate a God-centered approach to the identification method in conjunction with the focus on common human situations. Just such a combination is proposed by Donald Gowan in connection with his discussion of the pericope of Jacob wrestling at the Jabbok river. Though one might object to Gowan's categorization of Genesis 32 as a *saga* (thus questioning its historicity and its elements of divine intervention), his method of analogy/identification is instructive.

> The supernatural is . . . important in Gen. 32:3-31, the account of Jacob's night of wrestling at the Jabbok. But the description of what was happening in the dark leaves many things unclear, so let us permit them to remain in mystery. Whether he was wrestling with a man, an angel, or Christ doesn't matter. The keys to the saga's meaning are the setting (feverish preparation for the meeting with his brother whom he had wronged) and his acknowledgment the next day that he had encountered God. Does this not immediately bring to the surface the struggles we also have had with our guilty consciences and is not the story's account of a sleepless night before the day of decision the most vivid way possible of bringing our own guilt and selfishness together with the anxiety of the archetypical "look out for number one" man, Jacob? And of course the gospel in the story is that God didn't wait until a really good man came along; he chose a notably flawed human being and made him *Israel*, the father of the chosen people.[28]

Though the example is far from explicit in pointing to the possibilities for Gospel proclamation (this is a brief prefatory example; he is clearer in outlining such Gospel possibilities elsewhere in the book), they are readily apparent in the person of Jacob, whose patently sinful life did not prevent him from being chosen as a vehicle for the fulfillment of God's promise to Abram of blessing and deliverance. The Gospel shown

---

[28]D. Gowan, *Reclaiming*, 40-41, emphasis original.

in this text was that Jacob's sins were not counted against him, but rather were covered by the grace of God. The basis for this forgiveness was Jesus Christ, who would later come and be the ultimate fulfillment of the patriarchal promises of blessing and deliverance.

A further benefit of the identification method is the inherent affirmation of the constants--the historically-rooted truths--in the believing man's life: sin and grace. As they affected the patriarchs of old, so also are they present with God's people today. As Caemmerer has noted, "[Biblical narratives] are in Scripture to give the preacher a swift review and summary, a case history, of man's life under God."[29] Care should be taken, however, to avoid conveying the impression that all other areas of life are identical, leading the listener to the conclusion that the lives of the biblical characters should simply be imitated. The caution against moralism bears repeating.

Thus the method of "Identification-Analogy" is a helpful tool for the Christian proclaimer of Old Testament narratives, especially when it is grounded in the God-centered approach to the similarities in life. Purely anthropocentric methods result in legalistic exhortations to imitation, a design which ignores the Gospel answer to the parishioner's failure to imitate successfully. While sin is a constant in all people's lives, God's "Gospel answer" of forgiveness by grace through faith is the most valuable similarity available for the preacher to proclaim. As a combination of human and divine comparison, a clear proclamation of Law and Gospel is possible (even likely). The one remaining method is also important for Law/Gospel proclamation,

---

[29]Richard R. Caemmerer, *Preaching for the Church* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 135.

and often works in concert with the identification-analogy (and other) approach(es).

Christological Methods

Whether employed alone or together with other methods for narrative

preaching, the Christological approach is essential to all Christian proclamation.

Without the Gospel of Jesus Christ, His atoning death for sins, and His freely offered

salvation, there would be no use for Christian preaching. Yet there are several

dangers which must be avoided, lest the Gospel be hindered in its clear proclamation.

As a "stand alone" method, Christological preaching of Old Testament

narratives involves the well-known approach of promise-fulfillment. This is possible

not only with texts which verbally prophesy of the Messiah, but also with those which

narrate a Christological type--a prophecy in terms of events (e.g., the Exodus, return

from Exile), persons (Moses, Joshua), places (Zion, Israel), and institutions (the

sacrificial system, the priesthood).[30] As we have already seen with Luther, both verbal

and typological prophecies have their fulfillment in Christ, and can also be referenced

to the concrete realities amidst God's people today instituted by Christ Himself:

Word, Sacraments, Church, Holy Ministry, Divine Service. Connections like these

would be identified in the study of the larger levels of context as part of a narrative's

theological significance. Proclamation of such correspondences (cf. "Identification-

Analogy Method" above) is at its best when both the Old Testament reality (e.g.,

priesthood, sacrifices) and their New Testament realization (Holy Ministry, Lord's

---

[30]Horace D. Hummel, "How to Preach the Old Testament," in *Concordia Pulpit for 1986* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1985), 12-20.

Supper) are seen in their historical particularity as fulfilled in and mandated by Christ, and awaiting their consummation at His Second Coming. Indeed, such emphases will be present in all Christian preaching of Hebrew narratives, no matter what method is used.

As it applies to Genesis 32, the Christological method here described would supply ample fuel for the homiletical fire, centering on Jacob as the pivotal patriarch who was the one first given the name "Israel." As noted earlier in the determination of the text's theological significance, the typological interpretation and application of both "Jacob" and "Israel" could evoke many different sermon presentations. The patriarchal promises to Jacob, the sinner chosen to be the father of all Israel, even given the very name "Israel," are fulfilled in Christ, also true man but without sin, by whom all believers were/are saved. As Jacob wrestled with God at the Jabbok, so also did Jesus "wrestle with God" in a newer and greater way at Calvary. Here the resulting sermon would be similar to the "identification-analogy" method: as to the reason for the wrestling match, the parishioners can identify with Jacob as a clear example of a sinfully self-centered human being operating on the desire to control God; as to the result of the wrestling match, the modern hearer can recognize that in each instance the result was a blessing--for Jacob/Israel, and for the whole world. Other homiletical approaches would certainly be possible.

Another intriguing approach for Christological application from this text is supplied by J. P. Fokkelman, who notes that all of the dialogue in verses 27-30 really is not dialogue. Fokkelman observes:

> Verse 29 is a monologue, a solemn "order of baptism", spoken authoritatively. Here we attend the most important baptism of the O.T.; it is the more important for being a re-baptism "only". A well-established nature, a long-fixed route of life must be turned back radically. . . . The evil and long-awkward name of Jacob is thrown away and exchanged for a beautiful, theophorous name.[31]

The emphasis on the gracious change of name given to Jacob would show up in a study of the narrrative's *theological significance* as a clear parallel to the similar gift given in Christian Baptism, wherein the old name is "radically turned back" in favor of a beautiful, new name. However, this new name is not merely "theophorous," but is in actuality the very name of God Himself.

A potential pitfall to avoid is allegory (as previously discussed), which leaps past the narrative text itself, immediately announcing its actual meaning to be Christological. The inherently superficial treatment accorded the text (once again) would relegate the sermon to the status of "non-textual," no matter how biblical and Christological it may be. The message is valuable only insofar as it is based in the historical particularity of the narrative and closely connected with its corresponding Christological significance.

An example of strict insistence on a method of Old-New Testament correspondence is Elizabeth Achtemeier. Her method for preaching the Old Testament is presented in two of her books on this topic,[32] with the earlier giving more an *apologia* for the validity of preaching the older testament, and the latter supplying

---

[31]J. P. Fokkelman, *Narraive Art in Genesis* (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975), 215-216.

[32]*The Old Testament and the Proclamation of the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) and *Preaching from the Old Testament* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989).

specific guidance for the various genres that the preacher will confront. She regularly

emphasizes the importance of maintaining the historical setting of the text and <u>not</u>

dislodging from it a "timeless truth" for the purpose of proclamation,[33] even though it

be in accord with the total witness of Scripture. She posits a polemical thesis in

arguing for a critical link between the two testaments, suggesting that "no sermon can

become the word of God for the Christian Church if it deals only with the Old

Testament apart from the New."[34] The result of this view is that she suggests <u>every</u>

sermon on an Old Testament pericope be paired with a specific New Testament text.

This arises from her answer to the central question of the Christian's relationship to the

Old Testament. This she answers in several places:

> [The] New Testament writers consider the church to be the heir of the promises to Israel. Because in Jesus Christ the Old Testament story is brought to its completion . . . therefore the followers of Jesus Christ are those who inherit the fulfillment of the promises to Israel; indeed, it is they who become the new Israel in Christ.[35]

> Apart from the New Testament, the Old Testament does not belong to the Christian Church and is not its book. The Old Testament is the word of God to Israel, and unless we Christians have some connection with Israel, the Old Testament is not spoken to us.[36]

---

[33]Idem, *Preaching from the Old Testament*, 63. Might this be a rejoinder to Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.'s method of "principlizing" the Old Testament message for proclamation?

[34]Ibid., 142; in stressing the New Testament's dependence on the Old she aptly notes, "Apart from his relation to Israel, Jesus could have been understood in the first- to third-century Mediterranean world as another mythical Savior in a mystery religion or Gnostic sect" (114). Clearly, New Testament thought is inextricably bound up with Israel's history.

[35]Idem, *The Old Testament and the Proclamation of the Gospel*, 116.

[36]Idem, *Preaching from the Old Testament*, 55-56.

The Christian reads the Old Testament in light of the New, while understanding the New Testament only with the help of the Old.[37]

As a result of this, she teaches a method of pairing Old with New Testament texts so as to highlight the importance of this relationship for the Christian. Such pairing may be done in any of four ways: (1) promise-fulfillment; (2) analogy of Israel's and the Christian church's relationship to God; (3) common thought or motif; and (4) contrasting or conflicting messages.[38] The first three methods seem entirely appropriate and helpful. The fourth method, though, must be employed with extreme caution (as Achtemeier herself notes). Her examples, however, do not seem to follow her own cautionary advice; for example, she cites 2 Timothy 2:11-14 as "falling short of a true understanding of Genesis 3" and the responsibility for sin.[39] Conceivably this might involve minimal "caution" on her part. Perhaps a helpful corrective for this final category would be to label it "Seeming Contradictions" or "Apparent Contrasts," thus locating the reason for the difficulty with the interpreter, and not with God. In general, these are helpful methods of demonstrating the unity of the two testaments, though it is also true that the preacher should be sufficiently resourced to be able to elucidate this point (the unity of Scripture) in the sermon without always resorting (and limiting himself) to only one corresponding New Testament text.

Thus the Christological approach is essential for Christian proclamation. As a

---

[37]Idem, "The Relevance of the Old Testament for Christian Preaching," in *A Light unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers* (Gettysburg Theological Studies 4, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974), 14.

[38]Idem, *Preaching from the Old Testament*, 58-59.

[39]Ibid., 59.

method by itself it is able to facilitate the preaching of Old Testament narratives by highlighting the importance of God's gracious forgiveness and deliverance for His chosen people. This is seen in Old Testament narratives as examples of God's actions of Law and Gospel for the benefit of His people, and also as examples of the people struggling to live in response to these actions. In addition, both verbal and typological messianic prophecies recounted in Hebrew narratives point to the Gospel of their fulfillment in Christ. Such preaching is also valuable in that it details the history of God's redemptive acts in preparation for the coming Messiah (the specific topic of Thesis II in Chapter Four). As a method used in conjunction with other approaches it is helpful in facilitating (mandating!) that same Gospel proclamation. Dangers arise when overzealous Christological interpretation (!) leads to allegory or Marcionism. When these pitfalls are avoided, both the meaning and application of the narrative text have been taken seriously, and the Gospel has resounded in its clearest statement: Jesus Christ at Calvary, the fulfiller of the promises of deliverance, promises revealed even in the form of historical narrative.

Conclusion

In summary, are Hebrew narratives the easiest or the most difficult of biblical literature to proclaim? They may seem easy if one's homiletical method is nothing more than simply to tell stories. Old Testament narratives often make for good reading, and thrilling reading often leads to interesting storytelling. However, a good story does not necessarily make for a good sermon!

If the preacher chooses to proclaim a message of Law and Gospel based on a

Hebrew narrative text of Scripture centered in the death and resurrection of Jesus

Christ for the forgiveness of sins for the benefit of his hearers, then the exegetical and

homiletical task becomes somewhat more difficult. Such a pastor must have an

answer to the question "What does this narrative *mean*?" But to ignore the importance

of presuppositions in interpretation could easily lead to a shallow if not inaccurate

answer to this question.

The first step in this interpretation is to do the fundamental exegetical work of

translation and analysis. This was demonstrated in Chapter Two. As a foundation for

further study this step is indispensable. However, just doing the basics doesn't answer

all the questions of meaning.

Chapter Three supplied a historical perspective on how these questions have

already been answered. It was shown that as a result of the allegorical and higher-

critical schools of interpretation many preachers have been influenced to avoid Old

Testament narratives as texts for Christian proclamation. Such avoidance was hardly

the case for Luther! His hermeneutical view of Hebrew narratives as Christological

and Gospel-centered focused on their value as examples. Narratives serve as examples

of God's Law and Gospel actions on behalf of His people, and also as examples of

their faith and life.

The four theses defended in Chapter Four flow from Luther's presuppositions

for Hebrew narrative interpretation. These theses contend that the place to start is a

recognition of the formal and material principles of Hebrew narratives as God's Word.

In addition, a clear understanding of their theological purpose in selectively reporting

history is important. The historical record which is a part of these narratives is not an

end in itself. These same narratives play an important part in the larger context of

salvation history. As historical narratives, they also serve to clarify by way of

example how God dealt with (and still deals with) His people--ever in the way of Law

or Gospel.

As humanly-written documents, narratives are worthy of no less a status than

"good literature." Because of this, the modern-day reader must be competent in

determining the original author's artful use of narrative-literary style and conventions.

Knowledge of and facility with these styles and conventions is the result of hard work

with the text and regular study of the larger contexts. Since Hebrew narratives <u>are</u>

literature, the interpreter should not shy away from noticing as much as possible of

what the author intended to communicate through his writing.

The preacher will be most interested in the narrative's *literal sense* and its

theological significance. These two aspects of a narrative's meaning are closely

related and necessarily interdependent. The *theological significance* is determined

from a close study of the *literal sense* of the text, together with an analysis of it in

light of its several levels of context.

Application of this theological significance to the pastor's parishioners is the

final step in the exegetical-homiletical venture. Luther was quick to emphasize this

connection between interpretation and proclamation. In such proclamation Luther also

noted that the lives of the persons narrated in the text serve well as concrete examples

of faith and unbelief, and, more importantly, of how God deals with His people by

way of Law and Gospel.

This final chapter has surveyed the various methods currently in use by preachers of Old Testament narratives. Some were found lacking with respect to their presuppositions for interpreting the text and their ability to facilitate proclamation of the Gospel (Non-textual, Allegorical, Moralizing, and Expository-Didactic methods) while others were judged conducive to the attainment of these goals (Narrative Retelling, Identification-Analogy, and Christological methods).

In conclusion, one final observation on the meaning of Hebrew narratives is that some things will be and remain uncertain. For the interpreter to admit this is surely no demerit! Since he is in the role of servant of the text and since he shares with Jacob a place under the Law as sinner, a certain amount of tentativeness in conclusions is inescapable. As earlier noted, this is better than a false sense of security. One thing that is certain, however, is the Gospel message that narratives convey. Faith interprets and confesses the Hebrew narrative's historically-specific incarnation of this Gospel which alone is able "to comfort the saints who are weak in faith."[40]

---

[40]LW, 6:152, from Luther's 1542 sermon on Genesis 32.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Achtemeier, Elizabeth R. *Preaching from the Old Testament.* Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989.

_____. *Preaching as Theology and Art.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984.

_____. "The Artful Dialogue: Some Thoughts on the Relation of Biblical Studies and Homiletics." *Interpretation* 35 (1981): 18-31.

_____. *Deuteronomy, Jeremiah.* Proclamation Commentaries: The Old Testament Witnesses for Preaching, F. McCurley, ed. Philadephia: Fortress Press, 1978.

_____. "The Relevance of the Old Testament for Christian Preaching." In *A Light unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers,* ed. H. Breem, 3-24. Gettysburg Theological Studies 4. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974.

_____. *The Old Testament and the Proclamation of the Gospel.* Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973.

Ackroyd, P. R. "The Place of the Old Testament in the Church's Teaching and Worship." *Expository Times* 74 (1963): 164-67.

Alter, Robert. "A Response to Critics." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 27 (1983): 113-117.

_____. *The Art of Biblical Narrative.* New York: Basic Books, 1981.

_____. "A Literary Approach to the Bible." *Commentary,* December 1975, 70-71.

Anderson, Bernhard W., ed. *The Old Testament and the Christian Faith.* New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1963.

Bar-Efrat, Shimon. "Some Observations on the Analysis of Structure in Biblical Narrative." *Vetus Testamentum* 30 (1980): 154-173. In *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism,* ed. Paul R. House. Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 2. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992.

Bartling, Victor A. "Christ's Use of the Old Testament With Special Reference to the Pentateuch." *Concordia Theological Monthly* 36 (1965): 567-76.

Barton, John. *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study.* Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984.

Berlin, Adele. "Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David's Wives." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 23 (1982):69-85. In *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism,* ed. Paul R. House. Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 2. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992.

Bjornard, Reider B. "Christian Preaching from the Old Testament." *Review and Expositor: A Baptist Theological Journal* 56 (Jan 1959): 8-19.

Blackman, E. C. *Marcion and His Influence.* London: S. P. C. K., 1948.

Bohlmann, Ralph A. *Principles of Biblical Interpretation in the Lutheran Confessions.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968, 1983.

The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Translated and edited by T. Tappert. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959.

Botterweck, G. J., and H. Ringgren, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* GrandRapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1980. S.v. "$h^a l\bar{a}tsayim;$ mothnayim; $y\bar{a}r\bar{e}k;$ kesel," by V. Hamp.

Brauer, Martin. "The Allegorical Method of Preaching on Narrative Texts." B.D. thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1949.

Brecht, Martin. *Martin Luther: Shaping and Defining the Reformation 1521-1532.* Translated by James L. Schaaf. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

_____. *Martin Luther: His Road to Reformation 1483-1521.* Translated by James L. Schaaf. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.

Bright, John. *The Authority of the Old Testament.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967.

_____. *A History of Israel.* Philadelphia: The Wesminster Press, 1959.

Brown, Francis, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1951.

Brueggemann, Walter. *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989.

_____. *Genesis*. Interpretation Commentary Series. Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982.

Caemmerer, Richard R. "Why Preach from Biblical Texts? Reflections on Tradition and Practice." *Interpretation* 35 (1981): 5-17.

_____. *Preaching for the Church*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959.

Calloud, Jean. "A Few Comments on Structural Semiotics: Brief Review of a Method and Some Explanations of Procedures." *Semeia* 15 (1979): 51-83. In *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism*, ed. Paul R. House. Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 2. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992.

Childs, Brevard. *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979.

_____. "The Old Testament as Scripture of the Church." *Concordia Theological Monthly* 43 (1972): 709-22.

Clines, David. *The Theme of the Pentateuch*. Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Suplement Series 10. Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, 1978.

Craddock, Fred B. *Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985.

_____. *As One Without Authority*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981.

_____. *Overhearing the Gospel*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978.

Davidson, Richard M. *Typology In Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical τὐπος Structures*. Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, 2. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1981.

Ellingsen, Mark. *The Integrity of Biblical Narratives: Story in Theology and Proclamation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990.

Fee, Gordon D., and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982.

Fokkelman, J. P. *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis*. Assen and Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1975.

Forde, Gerhard O. "Law and Gospel in Luther's Hermeneutic." *Interpretation* 37 (July 1983): 240-52.

Forke, Terry. "The Doctrine of Scripture in Fundamentalist Theology: A Lutheran Appraisal." S.T.M. thesis, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1989.

Frei, Hans W. *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974.

Fretheim, Terence E. "The Old Testament in Christian Proclamation." *Word & World: A Theology for Christian Ministry* 3 (Summer 1983): 223-30.

Fuller, Reginald H. *The Use of the Bible in Preaching.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.

_____. *What Is Liturgical Preaching?* London: SCM Press Ltd., 1957.

Gowan, Donald E. *Reclaiming the Old Testament for the Christian Pulpit.* Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980.

Graesser, Carl Jr. "Preaching from the Old Testament." *Concordia Theological Monthly* 38 (1967): 525-34.

Green, Barbara. "The Plot of the Story of Ruth." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 23 (1982):55-68. In *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism,* ed. Paul R. House. Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 2. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992.

Greidanus, Sidney. *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature.* Grand Rapidsm, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1988.

_____. *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts.* Toronto: Wedge, 1970.

Gullixson, Theodore. "The Use of Hermeneutics in Sermon Preparation." *Lutheran Synod Quarterly* 29, 2 (June 1989): 25-77.

Harrison, R. K. *Introduction to the Old Testament.* Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1969.

Hirsch, Emanuel. *Das Alte Testament und die Predigt des Evangeliums.* Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1936.

Holbert, John. *Preaching Old Testament: Proclamation and Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1991.

Hope, Robert. "Preach the Old Testament." *Theological Students Fellowship Bulletin* (1970): 1-2.

House, Paul R., ed. *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism*. Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 2. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992.

Hummel, Horace D. "The Importance of the Old Testament Studies for Lutheran Theology." In *Light for Our World: Essays Commemorating the 150th Anniversary of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri*, ed. J. Klotz, 53-60. St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1989.

_____. "How to Preach the Old Testament." *Concordia Pulpit for 1986*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1985, pp. 1-23.

_____. "Justification in the Old Testament." *Concordia Journal* 9 (1983): 9-17.

_____. *The Word Becoming Flesh*. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1979.

Juel, Donald H. "The Old Testament in Christian Proclamation: A New Testament Perspective." *Word & World: A Theology for Christian Ministry* 3 (Summer 1983): 231-37.

Kaiser, Walter C., Jr. *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987.

_____. *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1981.

_____. *The Old Testament in Contemporary Preaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1973.

Kautzsch, E., ed. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. 2d English ed. by A. Cowley. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1910.

Keegan, Terrence J. *Interpreting the Bible: A Popular Introduction to Hermeneutics*. New York, NY and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985.

Ker, J. *Lectures on the History of Preaching*. New York: A. C. Armstrong & Son, 1889.

146

Kerr, Hugh T. *Preaching in the Early Church.* New York: Revell Company, 1942.

Kromminga, Carl G. "Remember Lot's Wife: Preaching Old Testament Narrative Texts." *Calvin Theological Journal* 18 (1983): 32-46.

Lischer, Richard. "Luther and Contemporary Preaching: Narrative and Anthropology." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 (1986): 487-504.

Long, Thomas G. *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989.

Longman, Tremper, III. *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation.* Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation 3. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1987.

Luther, Martin. *D. Martin Luthers Werke; kritische Gesamtausgabe.* Weimarer Ausgabe, 9. Band. Weimar: Herman Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883.

_____. *Dr. Martin Luthers Sämmtliche Schriften.* Herausgegeben von Dr. Joh. Georg Walch. Zweiter Band. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1881.

_____. *Luther's Works.* American Edition Series. Eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House and Philadelphia: Muhlenberg/Fortress Press, 1955--.

Marty, Martin. "Preachers, Get Your Story Straight." *Context: A Commentary on the Interaction of Religion and Culture* 24, 2 (Jan. 1982): 3-4.

Mayer, H. T. "The Old Testament in the Pulpit." *Concordia Theological Monthly* 35 (1964): 603-608.

McConnell, Frank, ed. *The Bible and the Narrative Tradition.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986.

McCurley, Foster R. Jr. *Proclaiming the Promise: Christian Preaching from the Old Testament.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974.

_____. "The Christian and the Old Testament Promise." *Lutheran Quarterly* 22 (1970): 401-10.

McKnight, Edgar V. *Post-Modern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988.

_____. *The Bible and the Reader: An Introduction to Literary Criticism.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985.

Mitchell, Christopher W. *The Meaning of* BRK *"To Bless" in the Old Testament.* Society for Biblical Literature Dissertation Series 95. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987.

Murphy, Roland E. *The Psalms, Job.* Proclamation Commentaries: The Old Testament Witnesses for Preaching, F. McCurley, ed. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978.

Myers, Sydney. *The Old Testament and Present-Day Preaching.* London: The Independent Press, Ltd., 1953.

Olson, Dennis T. "Rediscovering Lost Treasure: Forgotten Preaching Texts of the Old Testament." *Journal for Preachers* 13 (1990): 4, 2-10.

Origen: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus. Translated by R. E. Heine. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1981.

Patton, Carl S. *The Use of the Bible in Preaching: A Plea for Modern Biblical Knowledge in the Pulpit.* Chicago and New York: Willett, Clark & Co., 1936.

Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Luther the Expositor: Introduction to the Reformer's Exegetical Writings.* Luther's Works: American Edition Series. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959.

_____. *The Melody of Theology: A Philosophical Dictionary.* London and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Pickett, Henry J. *The Hebrew Prophet an the Modern Preacher.* London: Holborn Publishing House, 1922.

Pieper, Francis. *Christian Dogmatics.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1950.

Poovey, William A. *Letting the Word Come Alive: Choosing and Studying the Text.* The Preacher's Workshop Series 2. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977.

Raabe, Paul. "Preaching the Wrath of God Prophetically." Unpublished seminar paper, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, 1991.

Read, David H. C. "The Old Testament and Modern Preaching." *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 12 (Jan 1957): 11-15.

Reu, M. *Thomasius Old Testament Selections with Interpretation and Homiletical Adaptation.* Translated by M. Steuer. Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1959.

Rossow, Francis. *Preaching the Creative Gospel Creatively.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1981.

Saarnivaara, Uuras. *Luther Discovers the Gospel.* St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1953.

Sarna, Nahum. *Genesis.* The JPS Torah Commentary. Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *The Chrisian Faith.* Translated by H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928.

Schmelder, William J. "Liturgical Preaching." *Concordia Journal* 16, 2 (April 1990): 121-136.

Smith, George A. "Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the Old Testament." *Expository Times* 90 (1979): 100-104.

Spinks, Bryan. *Luther's Liturgical Criteria and His Reform of the Canon of the Mass.* Grove Liturgical Study 30. Bramcote, England: Grove books, 1982.

Stendahl, Krister. "The Bible as a Classic and the Bible as Holy Scripture." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984): 45-82. In *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism,* ed. Paul R. House. Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 2. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992.

Sternberg, Meir. *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading.* Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985.

_____. "The Bible's Art of Persuasion: Ideology, Rhetoric, and Poetics in Saul's Fall." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 23 (1982): 45-82. In *Beyond Form Criticism: Essays in Old Testament Literary Criticism,* ed. Paul R. House. Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 2. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992.

Stevenson, Dwight E. *Preaching on the Books of the Old Testament.* New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961.

Storley, Calvin. "Reclaiming the Old Testament." *Lutheran Quarterly*. 1 (ns: Winter 1987): 487-94.

Stuart, Douglas K. *Old Testament Exegesis: A Primer for Students and Pastors.* 2d ed. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984.

Terrien, Samuel L. "The Old Testament and the Christian Preacher Today." *Religious Life* 15, 2 (Spring 1946): 262-71.

Thiselton, Anthony C. "Keeping Up with Recent Studies: II. Structuralism and Biblical Studies: Method or Ideology?" *The Expository Times* 89 (1978): 329-325.

Thompson, William. *Preaching Biblically: Exegesis and Interpretation.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981.

Toombs, Lawrence E. "The Problematic Preaching From the Old Testament." *Interpretation* 23 (1969): 302-14.

_____. "The Old Testament in the Christian Pulpit." *Hartford Quarterly* 8 (1968): 7-14.

_____. *The Old Testament in Christian Preaching.* Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961.

Van Hoozer, Kevin. "The Semantics of Biblical Literature: Truth and Scripture's Diverse Literary Forms." In *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. D. A. Carson and J. d. Woodbridge, 49-104. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986.

Vawter, Bruce. *On Genesis: A New Reading.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977.

Voelz, James W. "Biblical Hermeneutics: Where Are We Now? Where Are We Going?" Chap. in *Light For Our World: Essays Commemorating the 150th Anniversary of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri*, ed. John W. Klotz, 235-257. St. Louis: Concordia Seminary, 1989.

_____. "The Problem of 'Meaning' in Texts." *Neotestamentica* 23 (1989): 33-43.

Von Harnack, Adolph. *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God.* Translated by John E. Steely and Lyle D. Bierma. Durham, NC: The Labyrinth Press, 1924, 1990.

Von Rad, Gerhard. *Genesis.* Translated by J. H. Marks and J. Bowden. London: SCM Press, 1972.

_____. *Old Testament Theology*. Volume 1: *The Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions*. Translated by D. M. G. Stalker. Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1962.

Walker, Williston, Richard A. Norris, David W. Lotz, and Robert T. Handy. *A History of the Christian Church*. 4th ed. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985.

Waltke, Bruce K. "Is It Right to Read the New Testament Into the Old?" *Christianity Today* 27 (1983): 77.

Waltke, Bruce K., and Michael O'Connor. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990.

Wardlaw, Don M., ed. *Preaching Biblically: Creating Sermons in the Shape of Scripture*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983.

Wedel, Alton F. *The Mighty Word: Power and Purpose of Preaching*. The Preacher's Workshop Series 1. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1977.

Wendland, E. H., ed. *Sermon Studies on the Old Testament: Series B*. Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1984.

Westermann, Claus. *Genesis 12-36: A Commentary*. Continental Commentary Series. Translated by J. J. Scullion. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1985.

Wimsatt, W. K., and M. Beardsley. "The Intentional Fallacy." In *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*, 3-18. Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1954.

Wolff, Hans W. *Old Testament and Christian Preaching*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986.

_____. "The Old Testament in Controversy: Interpretive Principles and Illustration." *Interpretation* 12 (1956): 281-91.

Wood, A. Skevington. *Luther's Principles of Biblical Interpretation*. London: Tyndale Pres, 1960.